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## NODA Today

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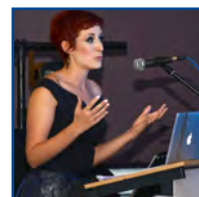
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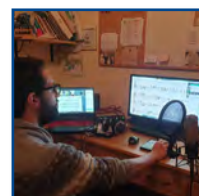
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### How have societies been keeping in touch when they cannot perform or rehearse?

See what societies have been doing throughout lockdown to stay entertained







# Welcome

**Michael Hastilow**  
Chairman of Trustees

Well, things have certainly been moving on over the past few weeks although, frustratingly, the one issue that most who read this will want to know is when can we return to our rehearsal rooms and plan and present our productions whether they be drama, musicals or pantomime and when can we return to our beloved village halls, arts centres or theatres? By the time this arrives on your doormat, we may know much more, but I feel that we may have to contain our frustrations a little longer.

The lockdown has given most of us the opportunity of strengthening our structures, brushing up our constitutions and learning how to make what we have spread out. Many have found new ways of sharing their creativity. All I can say is thank goodness for the many social media platforms that have allowed us to share experiences; the early days of passing the toilet roll, virtual choirs, monologues and an unprecedented array of west end productions available online. It was like having a gold pass to all our theatre spaces, but this is not enough to meet our own needs to perform live or make performances happen, despite us all becoming stars of Zoom.

Our magazine reports on many of the undertakings by members during the lockdown; from wardrobe ladies making vital supplies for the NHS, such as theatre scrubs and other PPE, to your innovative virtual performances performed at a distance.

Sadly, the NODA Theatre Summer School is not possible in its usual form this year and we have had to think differently and adapt. It is being replaced by an e-theatre summer school; I am excited to see how this works out. If the response to the training sessions we hosted through May, June and July are any guide (some of which are still available to view on our website), it will be memorable in all the best ways possible.

It would be remiss of me not to thank Jordan Spencer who stood down as Wales and Ireland Councillor on 27th July, only to be ordained Deacon in the Church of Wales at St David's, Abergwili the following day, we wish him well as he takes on a new role as curate in Fishguard. We welcome his successor Sharon Davies who takes on the role with immediate effect. Andrew Rogers will be standing down as Councillor for London Region in September, our thanks to him for the input and support he has given these last two years.

In September we will welcome two new councillors, Pam Armstrong for London, and Peter Oliver for the North Region. Peter being elected to succeed Gordon Richardson in anticipation of Gordon's, now delayed, elevation to President. Gordon, as Vice President, will, of course, continue to be a member of Council.

If there is anyone thing that NODA members do well, it is to adapt and right now the safety of our friends and audiences is paramount so we must adopt the guidelines as they are developed, adapt our performances and look forward to being together again safely in the future





# Who's who at NODA

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# Non-travels with the Chain

Well, I think I must be the first NODA President in history not to have seen a show or attended (in person) a conference for a period upwards of some 3 months. However, it has been wonderful to see and share all the various activities that have been taking place virtually over the period, while my (and no doubt many others) diary has been emptier than it has been for years.

It cannot be denied that these are, and continue to be, difficult times for all of us. We need to remember that “it’s the arts that keep us all buzzing and add enrichment to our lives”. So social media and online resources have, and continue, to boost our mood and keep our positivity. As many of us currently have time on our hands, this may be the ideal opportunity to brush up on some of those skills or learn something new, for example, why not take a look at some of the Health & Safety Courses?



My heart goes out to the casts of shows, who have worked so hard only to have had to cancel their show; to the committees of those societies, and the NODA Regional Committees who have the headache and heartache of having to undo all their carefully made plans. I am, however certain of one thing – amateur theatre will survive – with so very many committed and inspired people, how could it not?

**Christine Hunter Hughes**  
NODA National President



*Clitheroe Parish Church AO & DS - 9 to 5*



*NODA North Conference 2020*



*BCMS Youth Theatre - Buggy Malone*



*Preston G&S - The Yeoman of the Guard*



*Kilmarnock AOS - 9 to 5*



*Chippenham Light Opera Group - Sister Act*

## NODA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of The National Operatic and Dramatic Association, Charity No 1171216 will take place on Saturday 19th September 2020, at 2.30pm via the online platform Zoom.

The meeting is called in accordance with Rule 11 of the Associations' Constitution to receive the audited annual statement of accounts, the trustees report, receive reports on the number of members, the proposed rates of subscription and elect nominated Trustees, Honorary and Life Members, appoint the appeals committee and elect the auditors for the ensuing year and receive any other business of which due notice has been given.

To ensure the smooth running of the meeting, any resolutions to be considered at the meeting should be sent to: The Chairman of Trustees Michael Hastilow at 15 The Metro Centre, Peterborough, PE2 7UH or by email to [michael.hastilow@noda.org.uk](mailto:michael.hastilow@noda.org.uk) to arrive no later than 15th August 2020.

# Councillors' Chat

A quick note from your Regional Councillor



## **Tessa Davies** - East Regional Councillor

It's been an unusual experience since lockdown began. Despite cancellations and postponements, the most striking thing is the amazing activities that our members have been doing to keep in touch.

From singalongs, online pantomimes, quiz sessions (never has so much been known about theatre!) to the creation of vocal tributes to those serving through the lockdown. I am so proud of the East committee and society members for their creativity and enthusiasm during this period. Like theatres across the world, we are keeping the light on ready for when we can get back to normality.



## **Nanette Lovell MBE** - East Midlands Regional Councillor

Hello everyone in NODA East Midlands. Like all other regions, the East Midlands ground to a halt on Monday 16th March 2020.

It isn't easy at the moment to know the way forward, but, suffice to say, NODA will be leading the way to ensure that this business of theatre continues to succeed throughout the U.K. In the meantime, I wish everyone in the East Midlands region all good wishes for your future productions. I look forward to seeing many of these in the (hopefully) not too distant future. Take care, and stay safe.



## **Andrew Rogers** - London Regional Councillor

The highlight of our year, our Festival, was held on Facebook this year, in June. The virtual AGM and awards presentation was followed by hundreds of members across the region as we "virtually" presented 25 awards and the District Flames.

Societies have been keeping in touch with their members and audiences in this challenging time with a wide variety of online meetings and even performances. I trust it won't be too much longer before we can perform live again.



## **Gordon Richardson** - North Regional Councillor

After eight years as your Councillor, I write my last councillor's chat before Peter Oliver replaces me at the National AGM. During that time, I've made many new friends, visited many new societies, and hopefully made a 'difference'. I've enjoyed each and every visit and chat.

I know many of you will still see me around the region, and I hope that you'll support me at the National Presidential Gala in September 2021. It's been a blast!



## **Leslie Smith** - North East Regional Councillor

I hope you are all staying safe and well in these very strange times. It has been sad that so many productions have been unable to get on stage due to COVID-19.

I know, however, that many of you have looked at other ways to keep your membership together such as quizzes, online productions plus making scrubs and delivering food parcels, which does show how we, within the NODA North East family, can quickly adapt.



## Andy McNicholas - North West Regional Councillor

The past few months have certainly been very different to planned but it's fantastic to see that so many societies have risen to the challenges presented. The North West has seen a variety of online fundraising events for the NHS, the making of protective masks and gowns, all while keeping our members involved with online quizzes, rehearsals, script readings etc

Now is the ideal time to prepare for when theatres can open, take a look at the wealth of information within the NODA factsheets and NODASafe.



## Stuart McCue-Dick - Scotland Regional Councillor

The country might have been in lockdown these past few months, but I have been extremely impressed by the inventive ways clubs have kept in touch with members and audiences alike. Everything from a simple quiz to some wonderful online performances.

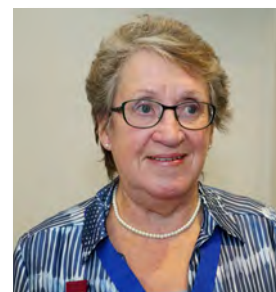
Even as restrictions ease, it will be some time before we can return to the hobby we love. Just remember, however, there is still a light shining in every theatre waiting to guide us back when it is safe.



## Kay Rowan - South East Regional Councillor

Many of you are having a great time in your virtual "bubbles" – Zoom, Facebook and all the other media have brought people together. I have heard of play readings, committee meetings, quizzes and even cookery demonstrations – NODA and the amateur dramatic scene are nothing but resourceful! Continue to be inventive and let us know what you are doing. I am looking forward to filling the diary when things start up again.

Take care and look forward to that great big HUG that is theatre!



## Graham Liverton - South West Regional Councillor

You continue to amaze me on the ways you have kept your societies together at what has been a tremendously difficult time. Zoom has come into its own, and you have used the time wisely with quizzes, workshops etc, we not only work as a team, but as one big family coming together! And I want to thank you for that.

For those that tuned into the awards evening, thanks for the feedback; it tells me that it was enjoyable! When we are back onstage, I look forward to your fantastic productions meanwhile take care, stay safe.



## Jordan Spencer - Former Wales & Ireland Regional Councillor

I hope that you are all managing to stay safe during these strange times. We have recently held our AGM virtually by email and notification of our award winners for 2019 has been sent out, with many societies holding their own mini award evenings.

By the time of printing, I will have stepped down as Councillor for the region and Mrs Sharon Davies has taken over for the next 12 months. Thank you for the support I have received, and I know you will offer the same support to Sharon, as you have me.



## Ian G. Cox - West Midlands Regional Councillor

In these uncertain times, societies and groups are to be highly commended for a multitude of imaginative and innovative activities organised to help keep members together. We were delighted to announce 155 nominees, and 68 winners at our virtual awards on Sunday 31st May, preceded by our regional webinar AGM. Congratulations to all nominees and award winners for productions in 2019.

Along with our regional team, I hope we can get together again soon and every success with your planning. Meanwhile, stay safe.



## Introducing your new Regional Councillor



### Sharon Davies - Wales & Ireland Regional Councillor

I have been involved with NODA affiliated Societies for over 25yrs. During that time I have worked in all sectors of a production from chorus, character parts, props, wardrobe, to direction and production.

I have directed shows from the more traditional like *Fiddler* and *Singing in the Rain*, to more challenging shows like *Chess* and *Aspects of Love*. I have produced reviews ranging from Old Time Music Hall to Rat Pack Evenings. This has given me an insight into the hard work that goes on not just on stage, which is all the public sees, but to the problems and mishaps that go on behind the scenes.

I have been a District Representative for Wales and Ireland for 7 years and have been amazed at the wealth of talent on our doorsteps.

At this very difficult time, with society's unable to meet, it is hard to envisage what sort of future the amateur theatre can have. But I am confident that, given the tenacity of the societies, and the help, advice and support of NODA and its representatives and councillors, that we will soon see a return of the amateur theatre in some form.

## Introducing your new Regional Councillors from 19th September



### Pam Armstrong - London Regional Councillor Elect

What an honour it is to be representing NODA London Region as your Councillor and I am looking forward to taking on the role, following in the footsteps of Andrew Rogers.

I have been involved with NODA London for a number of years primarily as the London Region Treasurer and was also privileged to serve Jacquie Stedman, in the role of Event Treasurer for the Presidential Gala and AGM 2018, when Jacquie (then Councillor) became President of NODA.

My own background and experience in the performing arts has been long, varied and joyous performing in principal roles, both singing and acting, as a dancer and in chorus, the genres ranging from today's modern musical through to the more traditional operettas – all have been a joy. I have also undertaken executive and administration roles encompassing Vice President, Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, Social Secretary of Musical Theatre groups. All these skills I hope to bring to bear as I undertake this role when I am confirmed as the Councillor for NODA London at the virtual National AGM in September.

What a joy our common interest is to us all, and it is no exaggeration to say, when I embraced it, it was life changing. We are now living through an era which none of us have experienced – uncertain, sad and dramatic times abound, times that are making history, and I very much look forward to the day when our beloved theatres are open again, for us all to enjoy.



### Peter Oliver - North Regional Councillor Elect

It is a great pleasure to be appointed as Councillor for NODA North. Whilst this is an exciting time and a great opportunity personally, to represent my area, stepping into the shoes of Gordon Richardson is going to be a hard act to follow. The thought of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis does bring with it many challenges, both to the NODA North Committee, but more importantly to our societies and individual members, who I know are all praying that this will be over very soon so that they can all get back to what they love doing – performing on stage and entertaining their audiences.

I have been involved with amateur theatre for the past 11 years, when a friend introduced me to Sunderland Operatic Society now known as Sunderland Theatre Company, and like many others I was bitten by the bug and my journey started. I was soon roped in to join their committee and have worked with several other societies in the district. Currently I am an active member of Murton Theatre Group; although I still like to go back to my roots and perform with Sunderland Theatre Group when the opportunity arises. Seven years ago, I took on the mantle as Regional Representative for District 4 which I have loved every minute: meeting lots of interesting people and having the privilege to review some fantastic performances. We are very privileged to have such talent in the region.

The next part of my journey is about to start. I have received so many good luck wishes and I know that I will be well supported by our NODA family. I just wish this pandemic was over so that I can start meeting lots of new people, working with the fantastic Committee and learning my new role.



# A message from our Patron

## Connie Fisher

### We'll Sing Once More

Since lockdown was imposed upon us, I have craved the escapism of theatre more than ever. I have missed seeing shows, both amateur and professional, more than I could ever imagine - and in times of need, like many, I look to theatre for comfort. The other day I found myself pondering words I have spoken hundreds of times on stage... "When God shuts a door he opens a window." Ok, I never thought that I'd be drawing on the words of Maria Von Trapp during a global pandemic, but in times like this we need hope, and since the outbreak of Coronavirus, the theatre community have found ways to metaphorically 'open a window' - finding ways to adapt their craft, stay creative and remain connected.

With the timeline on theatres reopening still uncertain, we must continue to find ways to adapt in order to keep our spirits up, our theatre groups alive, and stay connected to our audience and to each other.

During lockdown I have had to adapt to teaching performance via Zoom, and though it's not the same as a one-to-one performance session, it's brightened my days being able to help young performers continue to achieve their theatre dreams. In fact, I am delighted to share some good news regarding two of my students.



Connie Fisher - NODA Patron

Firstly, Isabel John from Llangain near Carmarthen was delighted to win a NODA award for "Best Supporting Youth Performer - District 6" for her role as Vi in *Footloose*. I started working with Isabel last year in preparation for her drama school auditions, and during lockdown Isabel not only celebrated her NODA win, but was also thrilled to win a place at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts to study Musical Theatre.

Other good news, another NODA member Sean Lewis, who I met whilst holding a *Sound of Music* theatre workshop in South Wales, has also won a place to study Musical Theatre at Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff. Amateur theatre has allowed both of these talented performers to hone their stage craft skills, and I'm delighted that they are going on to pursue professional careers as performers.

As a Patron of NODA, I am hugely proud that taking part in amateur theatre has such a positive influence on young talent. Huge congratulations again to all the NODA Award winners this year - I look forward to seeing you back on stage very soon!

The ultimate impact of COVID-19 on the arts still remains to be seen, but hopefully it won't be too long before we have some clarity on when it will be safe for performances to resume - for casts to reconnect and for live entertainment to lift our hearts again. There have been some incredible theatre performances streamed online during lockdown, and hopefully you've had the chance to enjoy them - I've certainly been enjoying singing along to some classic movie musicals on my sofa! However, nothing beats a live theatre experience does it? And I for one will be first in line at the Box Office when theatre doors reopen - queueing at a safe and social distance, of course. In the meantime, I hope that you are finding ways to adapt to be able to continue your personal passion for performance whilst theatre doors remain closed.

I know over the past few months many of us have felt lost and lonely without theatre in our lives, but remember, we are all in this together, and forgive me for slightly plagiarising/ mashing up/ adapting *The Sound of Music* lyrics, but, collectively we must, "Climb every mountain 'til we find our dream" and one day soon we'll "sing once more".

Stay strong, stay safe, and keep singing,  
Connie

x



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So with us in the middle of the interval, we should start looking forward to the start of act two and what that might involve.



# Act Two, Beginners' call. All cast to stage...soon

2020 has been a washout so far for live theatre. But what does the future hold for the industry? NODA Today National Editor Rob Williams dives into the current state of theatre and looks at what can be done on its return.



Credit Shaun Waldie

Who would have thought, at the start of the year that we would be where we are today? The world is a different place, one that none of us have experienced before. Despite all the changes, including the small amounts of fear we feel when someone gets a bit close to us in the supermarket and the longing to hug friends, family and the all-important grand-children, one thing has become clear - we are all in this together. That sentiment is something NODA societies

know well. For many, amateur theatre is much more than just a hobby; it is a way of life, a second family-going to rehearsals every week for months, making friends outside of work, the buzz of walking out onto the stage and the headaches from the aftershow parties. For those people, and certainly for me, there is a very large theatre-shaped hole in our lives at the moment.

Amateur theatre has been running

uninterrupted since the end of World War Two (some groups even continued during the war years) until now. Financially, the entire industry is on its knees. Venues like Nuffield Theatres in Southampton and Leicester Haymarket Theatre have already gone into administration and The National Theatre are making 400 casual staff redundant. Then there are theatre's support industries like technical hire companies, costume houses, prop makers to name a few. Their business





NODA Training - Stage Management online training session

stopped without any certainty as to when it may resume. Recent announcements have given hope to the many, but, at the time of writing, there has not been any description of the ways in which this help will come, or who may be excluded from help. Everyday, NODA head office has been checking, liaising, and working to find out as much as we can, but so far there has been very little. All we can hope is that by the time this article is published, details are released and money is flowing into the organisations that need it.

In a way the curtain came down on act one at the end of March and we're sitting waiting for the start of act two. But will we be able to carry on as we did in 'act one' or will the storyline have to change? Or perhaps this is our chance to change the direction of theatre? Perhaps this will cause a change we will look back upon and be so grateful for. I hope to use this article to show it's not all been doom and gloom and to give a few suggestions as to what the future may look like for amateur theatre.

Firstly, it wouldn't be right to not lay tribute to the fantastic NHS. The Thursday night clapping has been a small show of appreciation from the nation, and did develop into a way for musicians to show appreciation and entertain their neighbours when live and unplanned entertainment was so lacking. Amateur groups have been supporting the NHS across the country. Instead of making Widow Twanky's newest creation for pantomime, they have been making scrubs, face masks and ear savers for the NHS and key workers. In the London Region alone the 'Herts Scrub Hub' made 1200 sets of scrubs in four weeks!

One member (who I am now very jealous of) got the amazing opportunity to take part in the NHS Virtual Choir with Michael Ball. The song made it all the

*"Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise."*

*Les Misérables*



Performing out in the community



way to No.1 for Captain Tom's birthday and raised money for the NHS Charities Together.

Groups and individuals have been raising money for local charities too, including our own regional rep, Jim Briscoe, walking the 130-mile coastal route of Anglesey in his garden (page 27) to Darren Smith, from Guiseley Theatrical Productions, 17 hours on a treadmill to help buy equipment for the Leeds Cancer Care Department (page 24).

As the Her Majesty The Queen said to us all on VE Day: "Our streets are not empty, they are filled with the love and the care that we have for each other." The stories in this magazine and those I've had the pleasure of hearing about over the phone really do agree, and I for one am very proud that the amateur theatre community, being the first to close and likely the last to open, have come together to help those in need in these uncertain times.

As well as keeping busy supporting our NHS, societies have continued rehearsing via online platforms like Zoom and have even created theatre pieces specifically for lockdown; from one person monologues to full pantomimes. No more can I hide at the back of the dance routine, not really knowing what I am doing, instead I am quite literally centre screen for all to watch! Groups have kept in touch with members, checking up on those who might be away from family or living alone, and never have I ever taken part in so many quizzes!

Although live theatre is scarce currently, lockdown has opened the doors for streaming of shows from around the world. Organisations like the National

Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company have thrown open their archives for everyone to see. From classic musicals like *Oklahoma* to new musicals like *The Last Five Years*, and plays like The RSC's *Macbeth* to the National Theatre's production of *One Man, Two Guvnors*, we have been blessed with the time and the availability to see them all - that is as long as the internet didn't crash! Theatre has been made accessible to so many more people, and I for one hope that this will inspire those young and old to join us once we are able to tread the boards again.

Theatre professionals have also taken to social media to provide entertainment and resources, including our Patron, Andrew Lloyd Webber. His 'Composer in isolation' videos included the maestro himself playing songs requested from his shows, and call-outs for groups to send in recordings of their own versions, which a number of NODA members sent in. One youth group had their Easter production of *Joseph* cancelled, but knowing that Andrew Lloyd Webber had seen their lockdown version of *Any Dream Will Do* definitely provided a little comfort.

What about NODA? Throughout the lockdown, NODA Head Office has been at the end of the phone answering your questions and worries - from insurance queries to help with AGMs. To keep members theatrically active, NODA released a programme of training videos and online sessions, ranging from dance, to mask making, to character development, to best ways of running an amateur society. To date, over 2500 people have engaged in our online training and the videos can be found on our website - [noda.org.uk/training](http://noda.org.uk/training)



"Composer in isolation" - Andrew Lloyd Webber



Romeo and Juliet Photo by Topher McGrillis (c) RSC



Societies go from making costumes to scrubs



NHS Voices of Care Choir, featuring NODA member Jessica Griffiths



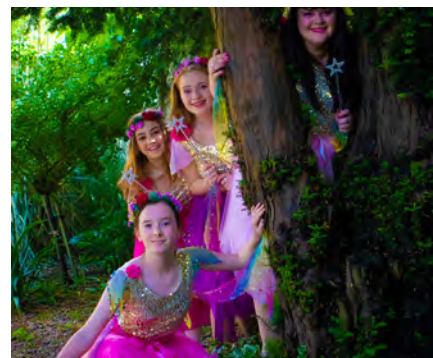
Societies staying in touch through music



Black box shows - *The 39 Steps*



Small scale shows - *The Last Five Years*



Royalty free shows - plays by William Shakespeare

At the time of writing this article, the Government has released their five-point roadmap for reopening theatres - and announced the pilot programmes to reopen indoor theatre, and also plans to spend £1.5 billion on the arts sector. In the press, there is a lot of discussion on how to socially distance an audience - getting them to their seats, to the bar and toilets. There are images circulating social media of a theatre in Italy with seats removed to ensure social distancing, usually accompanied by a photo of an aircraft packed full of people for comparison. Box Office systems have been adapted to automatically socially distance bookings and theatres are being bombarded with people trying to sell infrared camera systems to measure the temperature of customers. But as a lot of you will know it is backstage where social distancing is near impossible from the largest theatres in the UK down to the smallest village

*“A performance venue can really be anywhere - I remember going to the Edinburgh Fringe and watching a one person show in the back of a VW Camper Van!”*

hall, every single one of them no matter what show they do, will always need more space backstage. How can you protect cast members when singing on stage; with the 1m+ guideline of distancing? How do you dance with someone? How do you act a scene when you cannot be near your fellow cast members? As with all things post-lockdown, there are far more questions than answers.

The biggest question is will audiences suddenly return or will it take time for them to have the confidence to come out? And for amateurs, will the theatres be forced to increase their hire fees to amateur groups? We just don't know. I would love to say that everything will go back to normal once the theatre can reopen, but things will be different. The only advice we can give is to use the time we think we have to forward plan. Many NODA societies produce big blockbuster musicals with big casts and the budgets that make my society weep, but no matter what size the society, it is likely that this sort of show won't be feasible as soon as we are allowed to perform inside again.

We need to consider what is feasible, especially as we cannot rely on the audience figures we are used to. My society is linked with a 100 seat venue, so we are constantly looking for shows on smaller budgets and smaller requirements. That being said, we still perform big musicals like *Chicago*, *The Sound of Music*, *Les Miserables - School Edition* and *My Fair Lady*, all of which were done on a stage of 26ft by 16ft. Below are a few suggestions to get your planning started.

#### Venue

Are there other performance venue opportunities in your area? If you normally perform in a large theatre, you could look at smaller spaces for more intimate performances, or community

venues where the hire costs may be lower. Could different spaces within the theatre be used - the bar area for one person shows or studio spaces, even outside? The only limitation to a venue is the creativity of the production team. A performance venue can really be anywhere - I once watched a one person show in the back of a VW Camper Van (of course this was at the Edinburgh Fringe)!

#### Outdoor Theatre

Societies may struggle to prepare a piece for performances outdoors this year as we are now well into the summer months. However, outdoor theatre gives you a unique opportunity to try something very different. Maybe Shakespeare in the grounds of your local country house or *Alice in Wonderland* in the woods? Why not team up with a local caterer and provide a picnic as part of the ticket price? Outdoor theatre takes a lot of planning and you are obviously at the mercy of the unpredictable UK weather, but the results are worth it. On page 19, a NODA group gives their 'top-tips' on producing a show for the outdoors.

#### The type of show

Black box shows are great for smaller spaces (and the budget!). Shows like *The 39 Steps* or *A Chorus Line* can be done on empty stages with props and costumes.

Shows with a composite or fixed set like *The Last Five Years* (which is a great show for social distancing on stage), *My Mother Said I Never Should* or most plays by Alan Ayckbourn, can be done on a much smaller budget and use different spaces.

Rights always take a large chunk of the production budget. Why not look at shows that are no longer in copyright. Shakespeare (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* outdoors maybe) or *The Importance of Being Earnest*.





Fundraising events

### Recruitment to the society

Over the last few months, there has been a huge amount of discussion over casting within amateur theatre of shows like *Hairspray*, *In The Heights* and *West Side Story* to name a few. This is part of a wider discussion of diversity in theatre and how recruitment of BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic) performers is often limited to when a group wants to perform a show like *Hairspray*. Whilst that is a very general statement, I know a lot of societies within NODA that have been championing change. When advertising your auditions, go further than just your website and social media pages, go out to your local community, to schools, make your recruitment for all shows and not just for specific ones.

### Working with other groups

Throughout the history of amateur theatre, there was always rivalry between groups in the same town/area. Who is first to get the big shows, who gets the best week of the year at the shared theatre? In a post lockdown world why not collaborate, work together in



Alternative venues

producing a shared production to get people involved and to get bums on seats? Share resources and people. If we have learnt anything from lockdown it is that communities are strong and come together when needed.

### Special Events

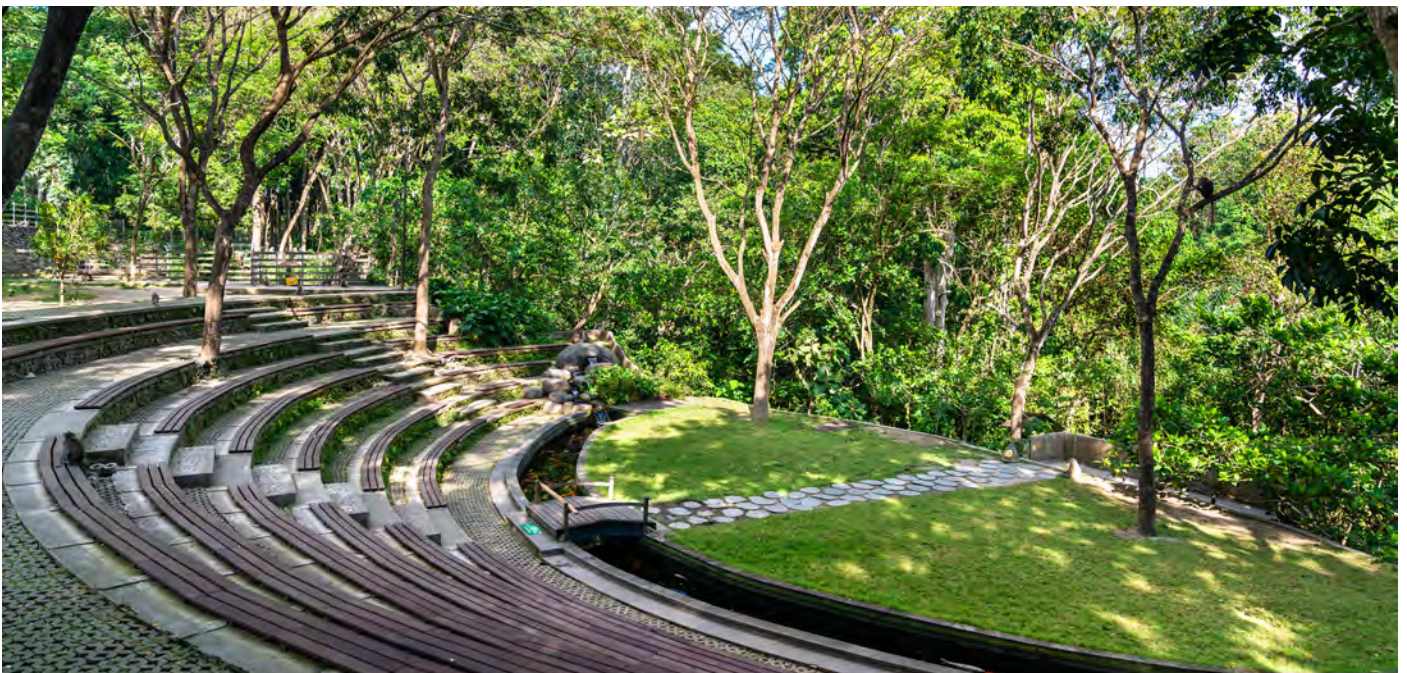
A couple of years ago, my group decided to put on a 24-hour musical. Only one person knew the title of the show prior to the launch. At 7:30pm on the Friday the group opened the box to see what show they would be performing the following evening. The event brought in over 50 performers and volunteers plus a full house for the performance. As a fundraiser it was brilliant as we only had the rights to pay for, but as something to bring together old and new members, it was far better!

In the media you will always see articles about big theatres struggling, the West End on the brink of closure. But what about small regional theatres and community venues. Almost every single person will have at some point in their

lives seen an 'amateur' production, whether that is a show at the local theatre, a group performing at the Christmas lights switch on or even their child performing Nativity at school. Comparably there are many people who haven't been to watch a cricket match, horse race or even football match live. How many theatre professionals started in amateur theatre? So, I really do hope that the government investment into the Arts will filter down to the smaller organisations who provide the backbone of the UK's arts infrastructure and it is certainly something NODA is pushing for.

Although this article is titled Act Two, none of us really know how many acts to expect, nor do we know when the interval will end however to quote *Les Misérables*, "Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise!" We don't know when or in what format, but we do know theatre will return, and amateur theatre will be leading the charge.

Rob Williams, National Editor



How can outdoor theatre play a part in the restart of the theatre world



# The 'Wor Vera' lockdown tour – performing at 100 care homes

NODA North

When the country went into lockdown, Deborah Taylor-Smith, like thousands of other self-employed performers, was faced with a huge amount of cancellations. Known as Wor Vera, singer Deborah performs wartime classics across the country to a variety of audiences. The pandemic, however, seemed as though it would sadly bring a halt to Deborah's passion. Not be deterred though, and keen to share some positivity at such a difficult time, she soon decided to continue with her care home performances – for free!

With that, the 'Wor Vera Lockdown Tour' was created, and Deborah set herself a goal to perform at 100 care homes, in a bid to spread joy and entertainment to the shielding vulnerable during the pandemic. The lockdown tour began on April 12, with the milestone 100th performance eventually taking place on May 28 – all within just under seven weeks. Deborah, who has performed in various amateur dramatic productions in her local area, said: *"It was really emotional. This tour has made so many people happy; I know that not only from their faces, but family members have been in touch thanking me for making their relatives smile."* Deborah's daughter Maysie – nicknamed 'Mini Vera' – even joined her during the 100th performance, for a rendition of the final song of Vera Lynn's renowned classic 'We'll Meet Again'.

Deborah has since continued to perform at care homes around the region and further afield, reaching 120 performances at the time of printing, with another 50 planned for the next month. She has also been spending her time putting together care packages for the homes. Wor Vera is certainly bringing a smile to those most vulnerable and isolated during these unfamiliar times, and it seems there is certainly no stopping her.



# Marking 100 years in style

## NODA West Midlands



When marking a milestone year, it is key to get the perfect show and mark the milestone in style. With the world in its current state of disarray, marking any anniversary, be it big or small, is hard. So when NAODS (Nuneaton Amateur Operatic Dramatic Society) obtained the rights to *The Sound of Music* and *Kinky Boots* to mark its 100th year, they were marking their centenary year with

a bang. With *The Sound of Music* set to be shown to the public in April, the news of the lockdown and closure of theatres stung them hard. The cast and crew had worked so hard on the show that it was disheartening and disappointing for them not to be able to perform.

On what would have been their opening night, NAODS released a video of their

Maria (Laura Warwick) singing the title song. While this was not the opening night they imagined they would perform, it gave those who support the group a chance to enjoy a snippet of what they can look forward to in April 2021 when they will hopefully be able to perform *The Sound of Music* to a live audience.

On the 18th May, marking their 100th anniversary, members of NAODS, old and new alike, got together virtually and prepared a rendition of, 'Don't Stop Believing', which they shared on their Facebook page. While they couldn't celebrate together, they certainly showed their supporters and other societies how they have kept themselves going for 100 years and the talented people who perform with them. While it is truly saddening that they couldn't celebrate as a group, they certainly marked their anniversary with flair.

NAODS hope to be back in October to finish their 100th year with their performances of *Kinky Boots*.

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## North East Virtual Gala Weekend

### NODA North East

NODA North East held a virtual Gala Weekend online to entertain and engage its members who should have been attending the real thing in Bridlington in April. When the Government announced social distancing, it became clear that the weekend could not safely go ahead and ticket refunds began.

Just prior to what would have been one of the first events, it became clear that one of the most enjoyable weekends of the year had been cancelled, and that delivering something online would be welcomed. Tutors including Dee Bennie-Marshall and Sarah Osborne were asked to record their sessions and a local Musical Director, Mat Symonds, complete with his tux, recorded sing-along tunes for the late night sing-along. A range of speakers were engaged to provide their updates including: Christine Hunter-Hughes, NODA National President and guest speaker, Jacqui Drake, who recorded an inspirational talk

about her work to raise funds for cancer care.

Once members around the region realised what was happening, they fully embraced this virtual opportunity with many dressing up in formal evening wear in their own homes to share in the fun. Pictures were posted of groups getting together over various social media platforms enjoying the chance to share in a brilliant weekend of online entertainment. Dee Bennie-Marshall, who was scheduled to run a dance workshop in the Royal Hall on Saturday, shared a tutorial video clip of part of the planned routine. With over 1,400 views, it was the largest workshop she had ever run. Sarah Osborne provided a vocal warm-up

York Light Opera, who should have been performing the Friday night cabaret, also shared some of their rehearsal footage.

Thanks are due to Jo Sykes the NE Youth Adviser and Bryan Craven, the NE Webmaster who did all the hard work getting the posts online. Bryan said, "This was one of the most challenging yet rewarding weekends I have ever spent. It was important to make sure everything went online at the same time as the real elements of the weekend would have happened. Not only did we broadcast all the speeches, but our guests were able to visit the virtual fairground and tour the lifeboat station."

The weekend usually concludes with the singing of 'Jerusalem' and volunteers were requested to record themselves singing the song, and Bryan edited it together to provide an emotional end to a great online weekend.



# Fourblokes Theatre set out to buck the trend

NODA East Midlands



*The Ladykillers*

Fourblokes was founded in Spring 2005, the brainchild of, well – ‘four blokes’ – who had plenty of experience between them in Derbyshire theatre. Driven by a desire to provide professional-standard theatre not constrained by the need to accommodate large casts, they set about creating what would eventually become Fourblokes Theatre Company.

It's well-known that the availability and quality of plays and shows designed for small casts is high. Still, many traditional amateur companies are forced into catering for large memberships, putting everyone onstage to satisfy the majority.

Fourblokes Theatre set out to buck the trend. Participants are invited to join or can apply, and on occasions, open auditions are held. This is not to say that Fourblokes is in any way elitist, but merely that it exists to produce the highest quality shows by utilising the highest quality performers and production teams from the local area.

From their very first show, John Godber's *Bouncers*, Fourblokes started as they meant to continue, immediately winning a NODA Award for Best Regional

Drama. Many multi-award-winning productions have ensued, and the critical acclaim has snowballed as they have added Nottingham, Leicester, York, Chesterfield and Repton to their regular Derby performance locations.

Awards have never been one of the company's main objectives; however, it's always been the buzz of a constant drive to attack challenging and often ground-breaking pieces of theatre that have both stretched casts and crews while simultaneously bewitching audiences.

People always ask where the ideas come from. The answer lies in thorough scripts inspection. Only those that get the juices flowing are shortlisted. Plays have been tackled that many may have overlooked – Tony Marchant's *Welcome Home* for example – or other pieces, have required protracted, possibly off-putting contract negotiation, as with the UK amateur première of *Cool Hand Luke*, or there have been scripts that have simply cried out for a Fourblokes spin, as with two Miller classics and Kesey's *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*.

The small cast dynamic very quickly



*Far From The Madding Crowd*



*Bouncers*

became flexible enough to not matter very much, as performers, including full-blown professionals working pro bono “just for the craic”, have flocked to join the Fourblokes experience.

Incidentally, of the original founders, there are only two actual blokes remaining. One of the former ‘blokes’ is busy creating a new life (and some stylish theatre) in Canada; another is writing exciting new works locally.

For the last fifteen years, Fourblokes Theatre Company has enjoyed great success and is now firmly established in the theatrical lexicon of the East Midlands region. This comes not only from much hard work, but also by staying true to its founding ideal – to create edgy and compelling drama without the need for compromise, any compromise.

The next Fourblokes project is... well, it's a secret just now, but it's another hugely exciting piece, and audition details will be announced once theatres start back.

For those that like clues: here comes a candle to light you to bed...



# Group provides 'top-tips' on putting on an open-air production!

NODA South West



Set build. Credit - Steve Annandale



*Two Gentlemen of Verona.*  
Credit Steve Annandale

**Brownsea Open Air Theatre (BOAT) performs annually on the National Trust's Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour - beautiful surroundings for eight summer evenings of traditional Shakespeare.**

Started in 1964, on the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's birth, celebrating it with *The Tempest* on Brownsea Island, newly opened to the public, BOAT is now a registered charity, and its donations to the National Trust and others has exceeded £300,000.

Over the years, BOAT has learnt much about open-air theatre:

- Careful set construction is central - check sightlines and the view from different seats. Screening prevents backstage distractions and rebounds sound. Aim for minimal story-enhancing scenery and props.
- Decide the seating plan. A compact audience helps the atmosphere and audibility. Numbered seats help patrons settle quickly.
- The open-air can challenge actors. Rehearse outside, practising projection and enunciation. Arrange for feedback from a trusted audience at an open-air dress rehearsal.
- A scenic environment can distract the audience, so make a greater impression with larger than life characters and ensure audience involvement by encouraging the cast to draw them into the action.
- Expect any eventuality: chickens invading the stage, deer eating scenery, and helicopters circling overhead have happened to BOAT. Plan 'blacks' for teeming rain. Consider actors' safety on slippery surfaces. Do not allow patrons' umbrellas in the auditorium. Sell ponchos! On performance days, monitor two or three weather forecasts. Keep patrons informed about bad weather via your website.
- Brief front of house well.
- Directing patrons to toilets and getting them back after the interval is a key skill.
- No picnics in the auditorium and only reusable plastic glasses.
- Patrons can fall ill, so book qualified first aiders or St John Ambulance. Prepare a comprehensive risk assessment. Have a public address system or at least a megaphone!

It's fun, really!

Their next production will be *Romeo and Juliet* in Summer 2021. Check the BOAT website for further details.

Steve Annandale,  
Brownsea Open Air Theatre  
[brownsea-theatre.co.uk](http://brownsea-theatre.co.uk)

# Theatrical Rights Worldwide

NODA Corporate Partner



Theatrical Rights Worldwide (TRW) is your full service musical theatre licensing agency. We represent Olivier Award-winning West End shows, Tony Award-winning Broadway shows and a wide variety of Off-Broadway and Theatre for Young Audiences musicals.

Serving the entire world, TRW's London-based Team is working through the unprecedented crises facing our vital industry. We're ready to work with you and eager to learn about your unique situation as a NODA member society. We're collaborating with professionals in all areas of live artistic performance to prepare special editions of our top shows and small cast musicals that will help address a safe return to our beloved stages everywhere.

Young@Part® titles are the authorised 60 minute edition of West End/Broadway musicals for youth theatres. Through a series of workshops with industry professionals and actual kids, the Young@Part® musicals are tailor-made for younger actors. Song keys are changed where needed, songs and scenes are edited for time and content, while keeping the spirit of the original show intact. There are great parts for girls or boys and can feature any size ensemble/ chorus, who are featured throughout the show. Some titles also available in 30-Minute Younger@Part editions.

President & CEO Steve Spiegel leads TRW Worldwide, with Associate Vice President Laura Manderson anchoring the London Office, with Kayleigh Ashdown, Manager, UK Amateur and Licensing Associate Freya Wilson and Director of Professional Licensing, Benjamin Alexander Newsome.

Visit us at [www.theatricalrights.co.uk](http://www.theatricalrights.co.uk)

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## A Message from The Really Useful Group's Amateur Licensing team

NODA Corporate Partner

Since March, many amateur groups have unfortunately had to cancel or postpone their productions and face unforeseen challenges. However, as challenging as these circumstances are, we have been uplifted and inspired by the positivity and perseverance of the entire amateur theatre community. We have seen an abundance of online singalongs, musical quizzes, homemade musical costumes and above all, we have witnessed that it takes more than the closure of theatres to stop the music!

In the spirit of keeping theatre alive in our hearts and in our homes, we send all of our members regular news and updates on the world of Andrew Lloyd Webber and amateur theatre through our TMC newsletter. Each week, we showcase the wonderful content being created by amateur groups, share new updates on our titles and give our members access to perusal scripts and background on the shows in our catalogue.

If you are looking for more musical inspiration, Andrew has been using this time to collaborate with his friends and followers, perform some of his greatest hits, share little-known facts about his most iconic musicals and give everyone a sneak peek of his brand-new production, *Cinderella*! If you would like to hear more about these exciting updates, you can visit our website and subscribe to our newsletter or follow us on social media.

We want to thank the amateur theatre community for its resilience and good humour through these challenging times and especially to those of you who have been working on the front line of this devastating virus. We are here to support you through the uncertain times ahead, so please do not hesitate to contact us with your postponement queries or any licensing questions you may have.

Stay safe and well.

Laura, Rob and Becky  
The Really Useful Group Licensing Team



[themusicalcompany.com](http://themusicalcompany.com)

# Playstage Senior to publish more comedy plays in 2020

## NODA Corporate Partner

Well 2020 has been an appalling year for all of us, hasn't it? Particularly for our customer base which is, of course, mostly, the older members of society, and we pause here, for a moment, to think about those people from that section of the worldwide drama community that we may have lost to COVID-19.

Still, we hope that later on this year (if the virus dies down) and early next year, amateur drama will revive with a vengeance and start rehearsing plays for public performances.

We, of course, instantly refunded licence fees to all those groups in the UK and overseas, who were scheduled to perform our plays this spring and summer. It was very sad to see the amateur drama world go 'dark'. But then we had a bright idea and we suggested on social media that people did play readings via Zoom – and they did! We started getting orders for

playscripts, and also most of our scripts are on the Kindle platform, and they began to be downloaded. There was an experimental period where groups gathered together again on Zoom and we saw a flicker of life in our customer base. Then, last month, we began to get enquiries about the availability of performance dates in 2021 and, this month, we have started getting our first bookings for performances in November/December 2020 and the first six months of 2021. AmDram is alive again!

So, during the 2020 summer months, we will be editing new plays, with a view to publishing them by the autumn. Judging by the licence applications we have received recently, drama groups are desperate to bring some joy into their audiences' lives by staging comedy plays. 2020 has been so relentlessly awful that people are going to want to watch something that makes them laugh. To that end, we will be adding to our already

award-winning selection of comedy plays later this year. We know the formula that works for drama groups and their audiences. *Old Actors Never Die... They Simply Lose The Plot*, *Lathered Up*, *Bunkered*, *All Balls And Ashes*, *Disorder In Court And Treasure Island* (Almost a Pantomime), are some of our most popular and successful comedy plays.

### We have comedy One Act plays too.

One other important factor in our plans for 2021 is that we are NOT raising any of our prices! The cost of scripts and licences will remain at 2020 levels. So, if your group is contemplating some activity soon – come and have a look at our website and see what we have to offer. Join our emailing list and keep up to date with our new publications this year. We always have the best interests of amateur drama at heart.



*Nobody loves a fairy when she's [forty] fifty  
Nobody loves a fairy when she's old  
She may still have a magic power but that is not enough  
They like their bit of magic from a younger bit of stuff  
When once your silver star has lost its glitter  
And your tinsel looks like rust instead of gold  
Fairy days are ending when your wand has started bending  
No-one loves a fairy when she's old...*

## ...EXCEPT US!

We don't believe that older actors should hang up their wands and resign themselves to playing butlers and grandmothers. We are the only publisher that creates new (and in some cases, award-winning) comedy and drama scripts where ALL the best parts are for older actors. Our plays have been performed in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, USA, Portugal, France, South Africa, Canada and Australia to date.



Read about our plays on [www.playsforadults.com](http://www.playsforadults.com). The scripts are also available to read on Kindle for a very modest sum or in designated drama libraries in the UK and Ireland.

[www.playsforadults.com](http://www.playsforadults.com)





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# Supporting the NHS and Key Workers throughout the lockdown



## THANK YOU NHS & KEY WORKERS

### We love you Miss Hannigan

NODA East



Lou Petch in action as Miss Hannigan alongside Beth Jennings as Lily St Regis and Ben Musgrove as Rooster. Photo Credit: Joe Taylor

Lou Petch, a long-standing member of the Bury St Edmunds Operatic & Dramatic Society (BSEODS), has been making face masks, selling them and donating the money to her local theatre. Lou first visited The Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds as a child and joined BSEODS at the age of 19. She has taken on many roles both on and off stage playing the lead, directing and also stage managing and in her words says: *"We are so lucky to have this little gem and it got me wondering even more about finances for Theatre and the Arts. There is no big pot to help, no big handouts and theatres struggle to keep going even in the best of times. I quilted and patchworked as a hobby and started making face coverings for my partner and myself and received orders from*

*colleagues, family and friends after taking a few into work. I am working through my stash of material, but decided I'd charge £5 per mask and put the money to charity; my choice was our lovely little theatre."*

Before lockdown, Lou had been busy preparing to play the role of Miss Hannigan in BSEODS's May production of *Annie*. The show was, of course, cancelled when theatres were forced to close. Everyone at BSEODS is very proud of Lou, and we are sure you will agree she has been putting her talents to good use helping raise vital funds for our theatre.

Katie Woodhouse  
BSEODS Honorary Secretary



## London Region makes scrubs

### NODA London

Across the London region, willing volunteers have been making scrubs and facemasks to support the huge demand for PPE in the health and social care environment.

Amongst those making this fantastic contribution are:

Annie Houseago of Centre Stage and SEDOS, Niki Davarias of Croydon Stagers, Jenny Harris of Maidenhead Operatic, Sue Howlett and Jenny Harper of Havering Music Makers and Sarah Russell and Gill Pigram of St Albans MTC.

Not wishing to single anyone out, but St Albans joined in the Herts Scrub Hub, raising over £10k in 4 weeks, which they turned into 1200 sets of scrubs!



## Fighting fires

### NODA North East

Darren Smith, Production Manager for Guiseley Theatrical Productions, just managed to fit in a performance as Jerry in The Full Monty with Heckmondwike Players the week before lockdown.

Darren, who is a Fire Crew Manager with North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, has subsequently been very busy. He helped support the implementation of Harrogate's Nightingale Hospital and

has delivered PPE to Harrogate District Hospital and care homes. Darren and his wife Alison have supported vulnerable people with medicine collections and drop-offs.

He has been part of the 'Safe and Well' telephone conversations and on two consecutive Sundays delivered roast dinners for those in need, including one to John Rushton, a D-Day Landing

veteran who was celebrating his 96th birthday.

As a personal thank you to the NHS on the longest day in June, he spent 17 hours on his treadmill to help buy a monitor for the Bexley Wing in Leeds Cancer Care department, doing this via Jacqui Drake's charity Jacqui's Millions.



## Members have been doing it all for the NHS!

NODA South West



Performing member and Secretary for CODS, Yvonne Youles has hit the headlines with her campaign to deliver over 1000 tubes of hand cream to Doctors, Nurses and staff at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital after an urgent appeal. Society life-member and past-Chairman Heather Barlow was a nursing manager inside the hospital too, ensuring distribution of the hand cream to those most in need.

They were not the only people inside CODS doing their bit for the NHS - their wardrobe ladies, Sue Sparham and her friend Rickie Pawsey have been busy sewing scrubs for the staff.

The Management Committee has been 'meeting' fortnightly via Zoom to keep on top of everything and to try to come up with activities to keep the group together. This has included two well-attended Zoom quizzes, dance lessons, a Murder Mystery Dinner Party, a cookery demonstration and an outdoor socially distanced sing-song in the park! Fun as this is, hopefully, we will be able to get back to normal before too much longer!

Yvonne Youles

---

## Cornwall NODA Representative produces face-masks

NODA South West



Sheila Gill, the NODA Rep for South West District 2, Minutes Secretary and Wardrobe Mistress for St Blazey AOS has been involved in making scrubs and face masks during the lockdown. This includes:

- Face masks for Cornwall Scrubs, her Doctor's surgery
- Some St Piran's tartan for family and others for friends

- Special wired masks for her husband and herself with filters in
- Sets of scrubs and a special little one on top for her 3-year-old granddaughter

Her latest challenge is making a scrubs set for her grandson, who is 6 because he wants to look like his cousin, except, in his words - 'I don't want pink!'

---

## Honiton Sewing Ladies sew something new!

NODA South West



Honiton is so lucky to have such a talented bunch of sewing ladies to create all their beautiful costumes. Look what they have turned their hands to now making scrubs, headbands, bags and face masks for the NHS locally and others in the community.

Thank you and well-done ladies. I am feeling so proud to be part of this company!

Karen Wilson



**Have you been making facemasks for the NHS?**

**Have you been raising money for local causes?**

**Send your photos to your Regional Facebook page.**



# Member sings with the 'NHS Voices of Care Choir'

NODA Wales & Ireland



A few of the NHS Voices of Care Choir with Michael Ball



Jessica Griffiths

One lucky member of a North Wales Musical Theatre Group received a nice surprise after recently applying to get involved with a virtual choir.

28-year-old Jessica Griffiths, who is an acting member and Secretary of Rhyl & District Musical theatre Company, and who works for the Welsh Ambulance Service, was sent an online advertisement by a colleague which asked for NHS workers who could sing to be a part of an NHS virtual choir.

Jessica applied online, and later that day was contacted by a record producer, who said that a high profile singer was releasing a charity single and wanted to put together a virtual choir made up of NHS members to sing on the record. Jessica signed up without knowing who the singer was, or what the song was going to be. She was contacted again later that same day, and told that the singer was Michael Ball and the song would be "You'll Never Walk Alone".

Jessica was sent a backing track and lyrics and asked to record her voice using her phone. Jessica says "I had to send back my recording to the producer by 8 pm that night, as it was being mixed overnight for it to be released on Zoe Ball's Radio 2 Breakfast Show the following morning."

It wasn't until Jessica heard the song on Zoe Ball's show that she realised Captain Tom Moore was also singing on the record.

The following day, Jessica and the rest of the choir members (who had now been given the name "The NHS Voices of Care Choir"), took part in a Zoom call with Michael Ball. "Michael Ball was really lovely and thanked everyone for taking part in the recording. He also asked whether we would all be agreeable to meeting up when it was safe to do so following the Coronavirus pandemic, to perform the song live," says Jessica. "We were then asked if they could record us singing with Michael on the Zoom call, as it was going to be released along with the single."

It was amazing how quickly everything seemed to happen from there. Within hours the video was being aired on the BBC and ITV news programmes, along with Breakfast TV!"

The single reached number 1 in the iTunes Charts the following day, and it seemed everyone was willing the single to get to Number 1 for Captain Tom's 100th birthday.

Sure enough, thanks to the public's support, the song reached number 1 in the UK charts for Captain Tom's birthday and knocked world-famous recording artist The Weekend off the top spot. It also entered singles charts in other parts of the world including Australia, New Zealand and parts of Africa.

"It has been such a privilege to have been a part of something so special. To be singing on a number 1 record with both Michael Ball and Captain Tom Moore is something I will never forget." Jessica said.

# Avocet Theatre Company raises money for the NHS

NODA London



*Avocet before lockdown*

Coronavirus can't stop Creativity. That was the message delivered by Avocet Theatre Company who created a 2 hour theatrical production - The Virtual Variety Show – whilst in lockdown and adhering to social distancing rules. The show was streamed on the group's website in order to raise money for the NHS.

The concept came after the group was forced to postpone rehearsals for their June show. Company members – past and present – reunited for this special film and the group held virtual rehearsals online. The show consisted of over 30 brand new acts all filmed whilst in lockdown.

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## District Rep walks the coastal route of Anglesey in his back garden

NODA North West



*Virtual Anglesey*

Jim Briscoe, District 6 Rep, was looking forward to his yearly visit to Anglesey. Sadly, the situation with Coronavirus put a stop to that. Not to be defeated, Jim decided to walk the coastal paths of the Welsh Island in his back garden! He managed to complete the equivalent of the 130-mile journey around his garden in 26 days, walking on average 5 miles per day at a speed of around 3.5 miles per hour. The total walking time for the entire journey was 37 hours and 11 minutes, and he raised over £650 in the process for the NHS.



*How else would you dress for a charity walk?*



*What it should have looked like*



*The real Anglesey*



# Sound design 101

by Matt Peploe, Sound Designer







We spend our lives surround by different sounds and soundscapes, whether that be the light chatter and sound of an espresso machine in a suburban bistro or the clacketing of tracks and the rustling of newspapers on an overcrowded commuter train. Our lives are full of contextual sonic information, all of which tell their own story. Sound design can seem daunting at first; however, the ability to create a world around a performance and to dynamically present a rich script and score to an audience is a fulfilling experience.

It was this kind of creativity that excited and drove a passion to pursue sound design & engineering as a career. I have been fortunate enough to creatively work on some of the world's largest shows both in the West End and Worldwide while mixing some of the biggest names in the industry. Productions such as *&Juliet*, *Joseph at the Palladium*, *Bat out of Hell*, *Starlight Express Bochum*, *Rocky Horror*, *Prince of Egypt* and many more. However, none of this would have been achievable without my many years working on amateur shows, something I still have a keen passion for. When I was 15, I was fortunate enough to be invited to my local amateur theatre to get involved in the technical aspect of their shows. Not knowing anything really (although thinking I did) I was placed on follow spot for my first production, *Bugsy Malone*. A few productions later, I was allowed to sneak over to sound. This was my playground, a chance to experiment, learn and make many mistakes, and most importantly how to get along with people. This world became my second family. The joy we all have of getting together on a Friday evening and somehow putting together a show to open on a Tuesday to an audience is an exciting experience. Although this opportunity led me to move onto professional theatre, I still always return to this world and still enjoy it as much as anything else that I do. Hopefully, I can help pass on some tips and tricks to help with your creative journey.

Preparation is key. It will keep you on the front foot resulting in less stress and more creativity. It's a well-known phrase across the industry that the performers have weeks to learn their parts; however, we have to piece it all together in a few days over technical and dress rehearsals. Although there is some element of truth in this, there is plenty you can do to stay ahead of the game. A clear plan and understanding of what the piece will allow, will allow you to get the most from your design. Start by reading the script. Look at piecing together in your head how things may sound. What soundscapes might there be? Also important, is creating a relationship with the Director, Choreographer and Musical Director. Learn their vision of the piece, talk about the creative construction of the show. It will soon lead to ideas. I try not to refer too much to other companies past productions as I feel this can dampen your own creativity, even though the story may lead you to the same results. Make it your work.

Now we have an understanding of what the vision of the piece is we can now start to look for supporting material, sound effects and soundscapes. These can all be thought about and collated before you get to the venue. I like first to source my 'accented SFX,' i.e. gunshots, doorbells, running cars, ensuring all are within keeping of the stories period. It's also good to give yourself options, this will save you time in the long run. Next, I can look at soundscapes and music beds. How to add subliminal messages to help create the tone of a scene. Take a scene synopsis of a script, along with the set/prop design and write down five key sounds for what you imagine you'd hear for the location of each scene. Put yourself mentally in that space; this will give you a good base to start building from. Maybe some scenes repeat themselves allowing you to repeat soundscapes and music beds, however adding a slight twist or additional accent will reduce the feeling of material repeating itself. Try changing the pitch or reverse a specific element for a unique variance and a change in mood. Maybe you can layer multiple sound effects together, or create your own Foley sound effects. Although there are many a website with thousands of sound effects available, perhaps you could create your own? Create a fire by snapping twigs and rustling a carrier bag, or the sound of seagulls flapping their wings by opening a closing an umbrella. Having all of this material ahead of the production allows you to sit with the director and run through them together.

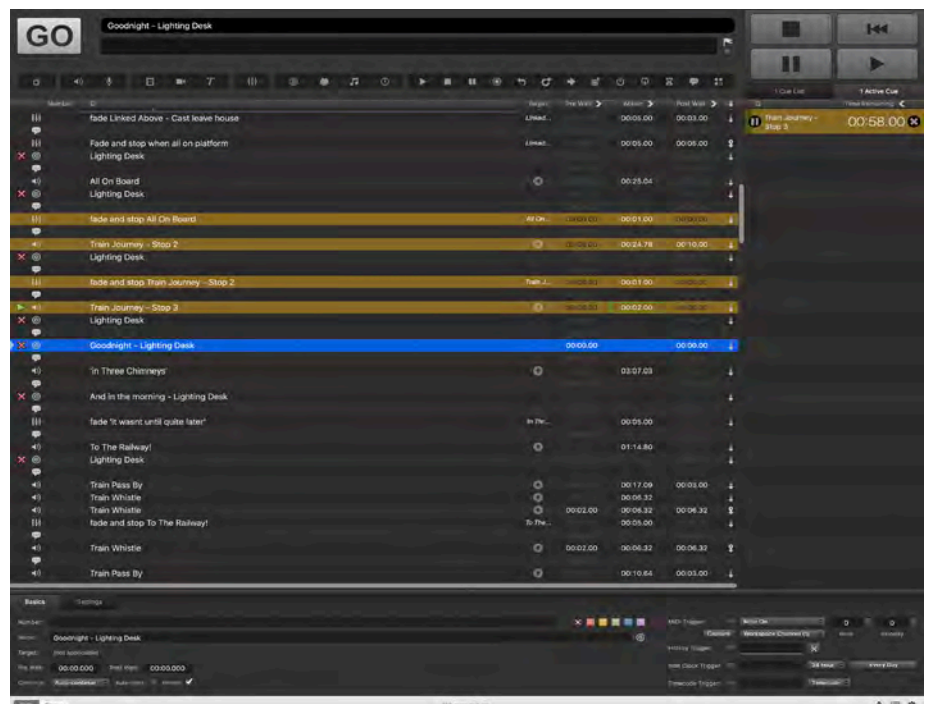


Nobody likes surprises. It also gives you more time to re-source material should changes need to be made. Why not take the material into the final run-through rehearsals? This will aid with performer timing and familiarity. Tip – don't forget the power of silence. Going from a busy sonic scene to nothing can help pull your audience in for an emotive section of the performance.

How do we now playback the material consistently each show? There are a couple of key options for either Windows or Mac. I like to use either CSC Show Control or Qlab. Both have free options available to allow you to experiment; however, it's an essential asset if you do multiple shows. Both will enable the creation of sequential cue stacks containing all of your SFX, soundscapes and console automation should it be needed. It also allows for easy editing. Fade Ins/Outs, crossfades to new SFX. You can use this software offline in rehearsal rooms, which can be a great aid. This software can output audio straight out of your headphone socket on your computer, however, for better quality and flexibility I would recommend purchasing, or hiring a 4-8 channel sound card to run with your software. A soundcard will allow you to better distribute your sound effects, instead of being limited to a FOH Left & Right Source. Maybe you could add additional 'spot' speakers on stage that are hidden in the set? A speaker in the car of Chitty to locate the engine sounds, or Upstage speakers used for the sound of distant traffic. If there is the budget, maybe you can sneak in a few rear surround speakers to have some soundscapes appear from behind as well as out-front helping envelope your listeners. Experiment and play! Cast Microphones are a vital component of any sound design and something that requires thought. The first consideration



Line array loudspeaker used to distribute sound



Show control software - Qlab

is quantity. Read through your script, and create a scene breakdown of who needs to be heard on a scene by scene basis. Although the ideal would be for everyone to have their own microphone, sometimes budget doesn't allow this and therefore mic swaps will have to occur. Next, where do we want to place the microphones? Is the show suited to microphones taped down the face or positioned within the hairline; or are headsets the best option. Headsets positioned carefully at the corner of the mouth will give you the best level before running into problems and therefore my default. Sometimes however aesthetics do not allow for this type of position, and so the forehead is the next best option. It is worth spending time ensuring the microphones are well-positioned, and most importantly secured on the performer to eliminate unwanted movement. The smallest of movements mid-song, or between scenes can

drastically result in unwanted tonal changes or level drop turning your sound design from great to mediocre. Negotiate with the production team to allow an hour with the cast ahead of tech rehearsals to fit the cast with their microphones ensuring a ideal position and secure fit is achieved. Make sure the performer feels comfortable with the position. Work with the cast by showing them the position you are aiming for. They will then be able to keep an eye on it throughout the show and aid you by moving it back into position if they notice it move. Utilising a second person in your sound team to aid with fittings and adjustments throughout the show will greatly help you maintain a clean sound.

Sweat is another issue that causes problems. Sweat cues can be added for your team onstage to wipe down unwanted moisture or carefully spray air around the capsule to clear out sweat at troublesome moments in the show. Wrapping mic packs with balloons will help to stop sweat from entering the mic pack circuitry. Make sure you check each microphone before each performance for sweated out microphones (these will sound dull tonally, and are sometimes a lot quieter). Also check for breaks in the cable/connector. Better to find these issues ahead of the show. Some sweated out microphones can be recovered by cleaning them with air and placing them in a small container with silica gel or rice overnight. Strong RF testing is also a must. It's worth putting time into these steps as it's the one thing that will make or break the sound of your show.

Plays are another variety of show that we all have an involvement in. How do we need to approach this genre differently from a musical? Maybe radio microphones for all the cast is not financially viable. The dialogue is still just as important as that in a musical and therefore we need to make it heard. What can we do? We can look at zoning out the space. Grid out your stage on a plan in 2m<sup>2</sup> sections and look at how we can cover each of those sections with boundary microphones. Make a blocking list during rehearsals of which zone each performer is in at each moment in the show. This means you can turn on only the required mics for the zones that the performers are speaking in. This will result in a cleaner and more stable sound. Maybe you can use smaller, more located spot sound effects speakers onstage. These are more subtle, allowing more sonic space for the spoken word. However you will still be able to shock audiences with accented sfx: door slams, thunderclaps etc when the script allows. This adds excitement and anticipation.

Another component of your design is your PA. Quite simply, the job of this is to ensure every element of your venue is covered with sound. Maybe in deeper rooms, you need to utilise a more distributed system by placing delay speakers halfway down your auditorium. This means you don't have to run the system at an uncomfortable level for people sitting at the front near your main system to reach people at the back. Also ensuring your cast can hear a monitor mix onstage comfortably is an important factor. Give yourself ample tuning time to walk around the space, listening to



Sennheiser radio mic receivers

familiar music allowing you to tonally set the speakers to suit their position within the space. Remember a lot of rooms can be very reflective, so keep as much sonic energy off the walls and reflective wooden floors. Apply drapes and dampening where possible.

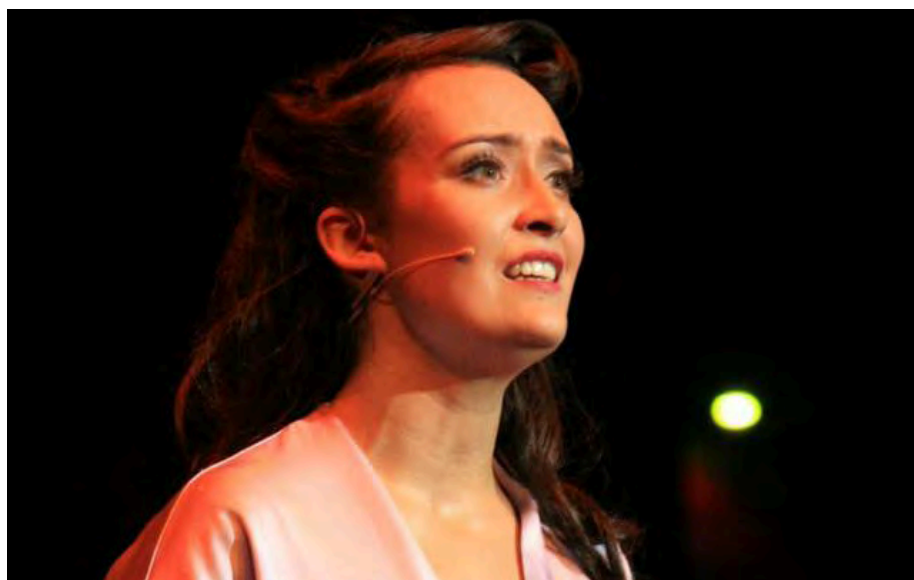
Walking on stage and spending time with performers ensuring they are comfortable with what they are hearing can help you get a better performance. A happy performer will mean a happy FOH engineer!

Now it's down to the mix. The exciting part, what all the work has been for. Remember to look for dynamics in a piece. Where can you pull the level right back to draw the audience in? Where can you lift the level to create excitement in the room? Remember, without dynamics, the show just sits in either an uncomfortable place for 2+ hours, or it becomes an unenergised show. Listen to your audience, ride their reactions, along with the performers' dynamics. Also receiving good, or more importantly, negative feedback from a first performance should be welcomed

as it aids drastically in improving the sound for the second show. Never be frightened to ask. Where possible keep as few a mics open as possible at any one time. This technique is called line by line mixing - something to practice as it will help with clarity and stability. Tip - make sure you, or a member of your team, walk around the space, if possible during final rehearsals, to ensure there are no dead spots or uncomfortable areas. Remember sound is a subjective medium. Everybody likes to listen to the tv at different volumes. We have all had tv volume wars at home! Listen to your audience, however, always remain confident in the decisions you make.

This just touches the surface of what we do and the excitement that we can find in sound design. Remember, preparation will lead to great creativity. Never give up, and always keep learning. I've made more mistakes than I care to remember. It's what makes us better engineers.

Please feel free to post any questions or sound related stories to my address below. I'd be more than happy to help.



Cast member wearing a DPA headset microphone



**Matt Peplow**

Sound Designer - MP Audio  
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# Leave a light on

NODA Scotland



On Sunday 15 March, Strictly Come Dancing star Giovanni Pernice had just graced the Whitehall Theatre stage in Dundee. The atmosphere was electric as the curtain fell. Little did the staff, patrons and volunteers in attendance know at the time, but they had just witnessed the unofficial end to, what was set to be a record-breaking Spring/Summer season for the theatre. Only five days later, theatres were ordered to close by the Government and then a further three days after that, the entire country had been placed in lockdown due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

The mandatory lockdown has had a massive effect on theatres and concert halls across the UK and further afield. As yet there is no end in sight for the beleaguered industry. The sad fact is some venues will not survive this crisis. Musical societies the length and breadth of the country have seen shows postponed, some until 2022, some indefinitely. It is incumbent on us all to do what we can to help ensure that our theatres survive this pandemic.

This is where the Whitehall Theatre is fortunate: it is the jewel in the crown of the amateur companies of Dundee and is a real hub for the community. This year the theatre is celebrating its 50th anniversary in its current form. The building has stood on the site since the 1890s when it opened as The Alhambra Theatre; it later became a cinema and a bingo hall before it became The Whitehall Theatre in 1969. The venue was run by the City Council until 1982, when the local musical societies raised £50,000 to purchase and upgrade the venue, reopening it as a charity under the new ownership of The Whitehall Theatre Trust.

In the last decade, the venue has been under constant transformation, with refurbishment works a constant to bring the venue up to modern standards, fit to accommodate professional touring shows and celebrities from all over the world. This transformation has also enhanced the offer to the many local musical societies and dance groups who use the venue regularly. In turn, this has seen the

venue blossom as its own destination, with 40,000 patrons passing through the doors of the theatre in the last calendar year.

The venue receives no formal funding and every penny raised through rentals, bar and confectionery sales goes right back into the continued improvement of the theatre.

Lockdown has taught us all the importance of community; human beings are a social species, and with the very nature of lockdown being one of isolation, we have all found new ways to socialise, to maintain bonds and see friends and family, albeit virtually.

Like many others, focusing on coming out of the pandemic in a better place, mentally and physically has been a focus of mine. It's one that has helped me to cope with the daily struggles that each of us will have faced throughout lockdown. Fitness has been something that I have thrown myself into over the last few years, and it has been a godsend

throughout this crisis. A group of my close friends and I, all theatre people, had taken up running as one of the ways that we can improve our fitness. We had set up a private group on Facebook that has been a bit of a support network, encouraging us to go out on runs and sharing our improved times. A few weeks ago, through a chance conversation on the group's thread, we decided to set ourselves the goal of running 500 miles in a month. The conversation then turned to fundraising for the theatre, something that is extremely close to all of our hearts with almost all of us growing up there, meeting friends, future family members, it's a place I took my (now) wife on our first date! From that chance conversation Rock the Road Run, our fundraising drive, was born. Our group is made up of 12 runners, some of whom are total beginners and some that are more advanced, but we all agreed to the goal, and that was it! We are now just past the halfway point in the month, but we have already collectively run well over 350 miles and have raised £2461.00 for the theatre. On Saturday 20 June 2020, the team set out on a 10k run from Broughty Ferry Castle to the theatre. We were cheered on by a large number of supporters along the route, which reinforces how vital the Whitehall is to the community.

The fundraising hasn't stopped there. The theatre has designed a bespoke "Leave A Light On" T-shirt to raise funds. The sale of these T-shirts has only just begun a few days ago, but we have already sold upwards of 70 units, which is just fantastic! We have also seen local business owners run raffles for their produce with the profits being donated back to the fundraising efforts. Our community has never been stronger.

At some point in the future, theatres will be allowed to reopen, and we will get back to doing the things we love, but, in the interim, we all have a responsibility to do as much as we can to support our theatres and concert halls through this extremely difficult time. This could be as simple as sharing a Facebook post or sponsoring someone raising money for a venue. These venues have given us all so much over the years; to lose one due to this crisis would be an absolute travesty – to lose more would be unthinkable.

Scott McRuvie, Whitehall Theatre Venue Co-ordinator

## Belfast Operatic Company support local cancer centre

### NODA Wales & Ireland

Though the current pandemic stops us all singing together, the musical society spirit is very much alive for one group. Belfast Operatic Company (BOC) has been meeting weekly via Zoom to rehearse music for upcoming events – there have been quizzes, movies, virtual concerts and rehearsals – but most recently they took on a challenge to support a local charity.

Belfast Operatic Company were challenged by friends at local charity Friends of the Cancer Centre, to take part in the 2.6 challenge. This involved getting 26 of our members to record a song as a thank you and in tribute to the staff supported by the charity and across the NHS. We exceeded our target, with a fantastic total of 41 members recording from home and taking part to support this special cause.

The 2.6 Challenge was launched in April as an effort to help support charities across the nation. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on their income, with the cancellation of thousands of fundraising events, including several marathons which would have taken place in recent months. Many of these charities rely on mass participation events to fundraise, ensuring they can continue to support some of the most vulnerable in our society.

For 35 years, Friends of the Cancer Centre has been dedicated to making a real and meaningful difference to cancer patients and their families across Northern Ireland. During these difficult times, the charity has continued in its work to support patients, who need it now more than ever. Friends of the Cancer Centre proudly funds 35 additional members of staff, including specialist nurses, who are continuing their vital work caring for patients and supporting them through the current challenging time. The charity is also continuing to provide financial grants to patients who are struggling with bills, including increased heating and food bills as a result of self-isolation. The charity is also reacting to the changing needs of staff and patients as a result of coronavirus,

including purchasing 10 tablets for the wards in the Cancer Centre to help patients who don't have access to a smartphone to stay in touch with family and friends through video calls.

Colleen Shaw, chief executive of Friends of the Cancer Centre, said:

"We would like to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone at Belfast Operatic Company for sharing their incredible talent with us as a tribute to the hard-working staff, including the 35 supported by Friends of the Cancer Centre, who are going above and beyond during these difficult times.

"Belfast Operatic Company's wonderful support is part of the 2.6 Challenge, which encouraged people to support local causes impacted by coronavirus. Friends of the Cancer Centre relies entirely on the generosity of the local community, but as a result of coronavirus, we have had to postpone our fundraising events, and we are also seeing fewer people organising events in the community due to social distancing. However, patients need our support now more than ever, and we remain committed to being here for them. We are hoping we can call on our incredible supporters to find creative ways to support us, just like Belfast Operatic Company, so that we can continue our work."

Through all this, it has been refreshing to see BOC members of all ages adapt and take to technology to continue doing what we all love to do, remaining a part of the BOC community while apart by singing together virtually. The single can be watched online at [facebook.com/belfastoperatic](https://facebook.com/belfastoperatic) – where you can also donate to this worthwhile cause.





# Barbara Benson Smith MBE

NODA North East



*Barbara Benson-Smith - then*

Remembering the Blitz in World War Two as a child, and then 75 years later being inspired by Captain Tom, fellow Yorkshire woman Barbara Benson Smith (ex-Whitby town Mayoress and local dancing school teacher) is coming out of self-isolation to street dance (well actually around the grounds of her apartment) to raise money for the Great North Air Ambulance.

Having had to put her 90th birthday celebrations on hold due to COVID-19, she thought that dancing 90,000 steps would be an excellent alternative to commemorate her milestone birthday and raise much-needed funds for a worthy cause. She has dedicated these



*Barbara Benson-Smith - now*

funds to the memory of her late husband, John, who was indebted to the Great North Air Ambulance during an incident in the Lake District.

No stranger to charity work, Barbara was awarded an MBE in the Queen's Jubilee year for her lifelong dedication to the theatre and charity work for the NSPCC, raising thousands of pounds from her annual dancing school shows, with the tremendous support of both parents and pupils.

Barbara is a well-known face in Whitby and the surrounding areas, having taught generations of children at the Benson Stage Academy alongside appearing in

many productions with both Whitby Area Musical Theatre Company and Whitby Amateur Dramatic Society (of which she is also President). She also finds time to be a voluntary worker at St Catherine's Hospice shop on a regular basis.

Barbara has a great pedigree coming from a line of theatrical family members. Her mother, Mamie Benson, was part of the famous Frances Ladler Sunbeams where she was spotted by Florrie Ford who asked her to join her in her productions.

At the time of writing Barbara had achieved 90% of her £3,000.00 target.

Visit our website for up-to-date factsheets on



Children in Entertainment (England and Wales)

Child Protection Guidelines (Scotland)

Model Child Protection Policies

GDPR Privacy Policy for Children

Disability Access and Sign Language Interpretation

# The Barn Theatre celebrate 50 years

## NODA South East

When Mandy Witt and Glen Kirton first heard fellow thespian, Peter Deightam, suggest turning a rather tired Molesey club hall and outhouse into a permanent home for their new theatre club, little did they imagine they would still be treading the boards there 50 years later.

While theatre lovers are all dealing with so much social isolation, let's take a virtual walkout to the Barn's now restored building and find out about its long and fruitful history.

It was a bit of a wreck, having been a school annexe, a youth club, and during WW2 an Auxiliary Fire Station and Air Raid Precaution Base. The Phoenix Club had been using it since 1947, but by 1970 it was tired, and so our little troop decided to try it out. Our initial plans were for five years, yet here we are staging nearly our 200th production.

The new drama group, with its ambitious programme, attracted many local budding amateur actors. Pirandello's *Six characters in search of an author* was followed by *Roots*, both directed by Deightam.

In 1971, Bill Sellars, the respected BBC Producer, took over as Artistic Director, renaming it The Barn Theatre. Along with his actress wife, June Bland, now Creative Director at the club, exciting new developments began.

Anne Stanton and Pamela Nicholls, who ran a catering business locally, made it possible for audiences to be entertained Supper Club style and The Barn began including some musicals into its repertoire.

*"It was all hands on deck setting up trestle tables, serving Anne and Pam's 2-course meals with home-made desserts, ordering 35 curry portions and even bringing in a fish & chip van for one of the shows!"* says Glen looking through his collection of programmes from the time. *"Look, here's a menu! I wonder how many can recall these fantastic evenings at the club?"*

To accommodate ever-increasing casts and a demand for a little more comfort, Ian Latter, another early member



carefully drew up plans to link the two buildings, adding extra loos and improving the tiny kitchen. Over the years he and his team completely transformed the worn outbuilding into the 65-seater boutique theatre it is today.

*"We were all real troopers,"* says Glen Kirton, the other remaining member. *"During the 3 day week to conserve electricity, we just used torchlight and Calor gas stoves. The show always went on - there was no stopping our enthusiasm and Molesey's theatre lovers still came out to watch! That was the spirit of The Barn for you."*

Mandy Witt always seems to be centre stage at key moments in the club's history. To mark 25 years she directed Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* and for the 50th year, she's cast *Sister Act*, just before the lockdown.

It's not the first time we've had nuns at The Barn. One of our earliest productions was *The Cell* by Robert Wales set in a school for delinquent girls, run by Nuns. *"We've also staged the musicals Nunsense 2*



*by Dan Goggin, but Sister Act is definitely the most ambitious yet. I wanted to cast as many of our long-standing members as possible, as well as welcoming around 30% of new members. It will be an exciting mix, with music by our resident MD, Charlie Swift and his band."*

In mid-March, the *Lady in the Van* had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but this will certainly be the Barn's next show. The cast meets online weekly to run an Act, share a few laughs and keep the show bright until we can open again. The *Sister Act* cast will be learning lines and songs remotely until theatres are allowed to open their doors again.

*"Nothing seems to keep The Barn from its purpose - providing great shows for local people, by local people,"* says Tess Townsend, who joined aged 15 in 1973, and now treads the boards and provides press and publicity for the Barn. The Barn is certainly still evolving, growing and looking forward, despite this recent pause.



# Why provide audio description?

Wyndham Players are one of the first local drama society to provide an audio described performance (unless anyone tells us otherwise). The professional theatres have been doing it for some years, and it is standard practice for films, television and also for museums and galleries. In my experience, so many groups think, *“We do our bit for people with disabilities because we have level access and a wheelchair-accessible toilet – what else is there?”*

There are lots of visually impaired people who like going to plays and musicals, but they end up missing much of what is happening. It’s not nice being in an audience where everyone else is laughing, and you don’t know why, and you can only guess what is going on during that long silence. Many people only go to the theatre by bringing friends to do this for them. However, a far better job can be done by someone familiar with the production. To do it for more than one person, you have to have the audio describer outside the auditorium and the equipment to relay it to them all at the same time.

I have known about professional audio description for visually impaired people for some years; it is a skilled professional job – but it is also possible to do it for the love of it, which is what the word “amateur” means. Having spent my working life with people with Sensory Impairments and being heavily involved with the Talking Newspaper movement, in the spare time left after my own dramatic activities, I have often found myself doing an audio description informally by the “whisper technique” which can only be done one to one and is bound to disturb other members of the audience a little bit.

## How did we do it?

We hired equipment from a company called Applesound which cost about £120 for 11 set minimum requirement (the 12th space in the charging unit is for the microphone set). The equipment is designed for tour guides and consists of a microphone and sending-unit for the audio describer and receiving-units and an earpiece (one ear only) for the participants. Even a non-technician like me managed to work it out easily, and we tried it out in all parts of the hall, and it worked at a range of at least 100 yards with a couple of walls in between. Our participants even said that they preferred our equipment to that which was used by the professional theatre. In professional theatres, audio description is usually done from a soundproof booth – often where the technicians work. We don’t have that – but we do have a camera which provides a live feed to a lap-top which we can use in the dressing rooms so that actors can see which scene they are up to. That worked excellently, and the audio describer sat in the corridor outside the dressing rooms

At Wyndham Players, we provide copies of the script for deaf people and arrange for them to have front row seats, so they have the light from the stage to read it by and are closest to be able to lip-read when possible. This is not suitable for all deaf people, of course – but it is straightforward to do!

## Spreading the word

The local Talking Newspaper service for visually impaired people carried an advertisement. (If you don’t know your local talking newspaper go to [www.tnf.org.uk](http://www.tnf.org.uk) and check it out) The local newspaper printed an article about our new venture which also helped advertise the production, and we also were given a slot on local radio. The association for blind and partially sighted people also sent our information round to their contact lists, and we linked in with the professional theatre too. We then created our contact list for future use from that network (with due regard to GDPR of course).

## Delivering the service

The person delivering the audio description needs to have good diction, good concentration, good timing and to be able to think quickly on their feet in case they have to make something up on the spot (which is why it has to be done live and not pre-recorded!). Those qualities are frequently found on stage, so not a problem.

The audio describer attended lots of rehearsals or performances (at least four or five) and would write their script. We found that interleaving the Samuel French script with blank paper worked well.

To get an idea of what kind of things to say and how to say it – try



***“We do our bit for people with disabilities because we have level access and a wheelchair-accessible toilet – what else is there?”***

watching a few television programmes that are audio described. If your remote doesn't have an AD button – go to settings and accessibility to switch it on. It is a skill to choose just the right words to say and finding the right timing when to speak without cutting across the dialogue, but it does get better with a bit of practice. Our audio describer said that he enjoyed doing it, and felt involved in the play in a different way, and the praise from the participants was a bonus,

### *The experience and feedback*

The Saturday matinee performance was dedicated for Audio Description as visually impaired people may prefer not to travel in the dark. One person was responsible for taking bookings by phone, which also enabled special requirements to be noted. Front row seats were reserved with extra room for guide dogs and for those people with residual vision who are able to see main shapes or lighting changes.

Front of house staff were trained in sighted guide techniques and basic awareness of visual impairment assistance. Large print copies of the programme with a synopsis of the show and a description of the set (16pt Ariel minimum) were available and in some cases emailed in advance.

Our participants were very appreciative; they said we did it very well, and they were especially chuffed by the fact that we were doing at all. People appreciated that the cast met them and gave them an idea of their voices in and out of character. Some professional theatres offer touch tours where they can walk around the stage and feel the props – our participants were happy to have it described.

### *Would we do it again?*

Now we have broken the ice; I would love to think that other groups would like to consider doing it too. I would be very happy to talk it through and share some hints and tips on sighted guide techniques when dealing with visually impaired people.

**Georgette Vale**  
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# Collecting creativity despite the lockdown

On 18th March, (which seems like a lifetime ago now) as I prepared to lead a day of workshops in a school that was preparing for something that nobody within it could imagine, I was thinking about all the creative opportunities that had been or were about to be cancelled...I decided that a remote solution, or at least a band-aid was needed, and a quick Facebook shout out told me I was right.

In that moment the Yew Tree Creative Collective was born.

The premise of it is simple - every day I post a starting point to inspire a creative response in the Collective's Facebook group inviting a response in any form, words, music, video, voice recording, images etc. It's a double happy hit - people get to spend time making things and then enjoy the things others have made. Members of the group come from NODA, Yew Tree Youth Theatre, parents of students, friends and colleagues. They are all united by the desire to distract themselves from some of the harsher realities we are facing right now with some creative dalliance...

The collective has the usual ethos of my work, it's a supportive community where people share creative thoughts and ideas so all observations are positive and work isn't shared beyond the group without permission. People are invited to dip in and out whenever the mood takes them and at the end of the day we share good news from our day.

On that March morning, I could not have imagined the sheer magnitude of creativity the group would collect - at the time of writing we have just completed our 70th task - 10 weeks of daily creative distraction. It's a pleasure and privilege to be part of it, but rather than me tell you how things have been developed over the weeks, I thought I would hand over to NODA members of the collective themselves.

If you would like any further information about the collective - please email [sarah@yew-tree.com](mailto:sarah@yew-tree.com)

## **Carly lives a stone's throw from the venue of last year's Summer School in the West Midlands:**

*"One of the things that I think all of us at NODA Summer School is missing is just being together; being creative together. We're so used to being in a theatre, a village hall, a church hall, a school, the back of a pub - wherever we can - and making stuff. The Creative Collective allows us to be creative, in a safe and non-judgemental space. I don't engage with every post; some of them I'm not a fan of, or something else occupies me that day, but I love to read everyone else's responses. It's also a super way of getting to know people and finding out what connections you have with them. I also learnt that another member enjoys the correct use of grammar as much as myself. It's also really nice when someone responds to your response with a "like" or a "love" - ah, how we love instant gratification, particularly in these weird times.*

*During the lockdown, my sleep pattern has been all over the place, so writing a haiku about my lack of sleep was quite cathartic! I also enjoyed reminiscing about a piece of jewellery that has significance to me (a bracelet my Auntie gave to me on my 18th birthday, in case you're wondering). And the one that grabbed me the most - of course - was when Sarah asked me to talk about shoes. Many photos of my favourite heels followed..."*

## **Eileen who is locked down in Lombardy, Italy says:**

*The Collective has been a lifeline and a daily focus for me in so many ways. It has reminded me how much I love to write, and the various challenges are fun and stimulating, a marvellous way to take my mind off the world of virus and lockdown for a little while. Even on the days when I don't actively participate, I love to read everyone's contributions. The network of like-minded people brings a sense of connection and delight, and it's great to hear others' stories, get to know them better, wonder at their imagination and talent. There are members who I already know and new acquaintances... so it's rather like NODA Summer School, a rich mix of personalities having fun together in an open-hearted, positive, supportive way.*

## **Mark is much closer to the Collective HQ in Harrogate, but in the current situation, it might as well be another planet:**

*When the lockdown was announced I was one of those people who hardly found time in the day to watch TV let alone find time to fulfil my creative needs.*

*I therefore immediately responded to Sarah's invite to the Yew Tree Collective as soon as it was set up. Each day we get a new challenge and it's great! There is no pressure to take part in every task. If you are not inspired to take part in that day's event it is uplifting to see what others are producing. For me "Wordsmith Wednesday" is my favourite. It gives me another certain event in the week to look forward to (and also reminds me what day it is!) I think we should make it into a book at the end of all this and raise funds for local youth drama groups who will be suffering financially at the end of all this."*

### And there is Penny who really is in the back of beyond:

Where I live, I have no immediate neighbours. I have no view of any road or other houses. Suffice to say that my self-isolation has been more of a 'desert island castaway' and far more than just not meeting up with chums! The last time I was in a shop or indeed was outside the curtilage of my property was 9th March 2020. I have seen no family and no friends since then. I have spoken to one food delivery driver and this caused me such emotion that I had to share it on the Collective. It was greeted with the same care and compassion as if I had delivered some melancholic news.

So, from my perspective, the Collective has become my family. It is always there and I can dip into it anytime I feel I need companionship or anytime I need reassurance. I can comment if I wish or just remain as a caring onlooker from afar. I had at one point thought this was voyeuristic, but soon realised that this is actually quite common. I feel a real connection now with many of whom I had heard of, but never had any contact. I cannot wait for the day when I might be able to meet them face to face, perhaps at Summer school. I love the camaraderie, the laughs and the support we give each other. I love the sense of belonging and the feeling that our frailties are not weaknesses, and that our successes or failures are welcomed in equal measure.

The imaginative and creative activities that are given to us are inspiring. I admire the input from all those taking part and think about the task throughout the day, often with dynamism and animation not witnessed with any other daily routine, thus enabling my brain more activity in one hour than normally experienced during my usual soporific afternoons!

Being rather insecure I am rather hesitant in posting comments as I fear ridicule, thus a highlight for me is just one simple 'like' or a response to a comment I have made. Simple things eh?

What has been important to me is the knowledge that others have opened up about their struggles, which has mirrored my own demons, throughout this time. I have attempted to privately message anyone who has commented that their day has not gone well. In this respect, it has given me a sense of purposefulness as I have to admit that at times I have struggled to plan anything, struggled to concentrate and struggled to maintain a focus. My desert island is now full of others stranded from their ships, and as far as possible I have endeavoured to help them to come ashore, as much as they have aided me to rise above the shuddering waves. My once deserted island is becoming full now and the sand is hosting a party of friends.

The Collective has certainly been my rescue ship, and whilst I would love to escape from this island, I will feel a sense of loss once the Captain delivers me safely home.

### And finally, there is Jo who we are lucky to have as the North East Youth Advisor for NODA

"The invite to join 'Yew Tree Creative Collective' arrived on 18th March, the day after the last piece of live theatre I realised I was going to see for some time (A wonderful Youth Production of LMM's 'In The Heights').

Who could say no to a chance to do something creative in a safe and secure environment with amazing people when you can't leave your own home?

Only a couple of weeks before Lockdown was announced, a friend asked me if I owned a sofa and TV – my response was "Yes". He explained it puzzled him why I needed these things as with a busy job, several demanding hobbies and a family I was clearly never at home to use them. My response was "that is just how I like it"....How wrong this assumption was, 'staying home' has become the new 'going out' and we all have had to adapt to find ways to be positive about this 'new normal'.

I accepted the invite with no trepidation – anyone who has worked with Sarah Osborne knows there are no right or wrong answers, good days and bad days are accepted with good grace and the supportive feel of the group seeps as if by osmosis through the posts, the icons and the comments – you know you are among friends and like-minded people.

Together we have challenged ourselves to be continually creative and shared our passions, pleasures, delights and anxieties – we are indeed a Creative Collective and it is certainly one of the things which is getting me through this strange set of circumstances in which we find ourselves."



### Summer school celebrity Tracy is in Hereford:

"I enjoyed putting my ideas and thought into the collective during the lockdown. My highlight has been seeing everyone's ideas."

### Lynn is in Northamptonshire

"The daily collective has helped me enormously in these troubled days. It has brought us all together, and we seem to feed off each other. It also helps us to keep a sense of familiarity, which we all desperately need as we head into a kind of unknown.

As I read each days' task, I begin to think of an appropriate response. One which I hope will amuse, or entertain, or even support. It also encourages me to sometimes sit and reflect, something I maybe had no time for before the virus. It also puts things into perspective. Some in the collective are struggling more than others, and it's instinctive to reach out and try to help – even if it's only with words of comfort and love."



# NODA is here for you

NODA Head Office has been open throughout the lockdown period. From supporting members with cancelling productions, to assisting with Rightsholders and looking into copyright law for filming songs for social media, to discussing digital AGM possibilities, we've been very busy trying to get you the information you need and want.

Throughout the regions, quizzes, competitions and workout sessions have been held online to keep members active. Four months ago, most people had not heard of Zoom, but now it is a vital method of keeping in touch, with societies holding rehearsals, social events and even shows on the platform.

NODA has not been exempt to the cancellation of events. The majority of our Regional Conferences have had to be cancelled, however, the awards due to be presented at these events have still gone out to the deserving members and societies. Whether you have received notification of your award digitally or already received your certificates, we want to show that the amateur theatre world is still together, and what better way to bring a smile to our societies' faces than by recognising their hard work and dedication.

Our National Gala and AGM weekend at Durham has been postponed, but the AGM will take place online. Christine Hunter Hughes has kindly agreed to continue as National President for a further 12 months before she hands over the chain to Vice President Gordon Richardson at Durham in 2021. We hope the extra time between the original National Gala and the new proposed date will ensure that the event is one to remember and becomes a symbol of the determination of NODA and its members to keep amateur theatre alive and kicking.

As you can imagine, NODA Insurance has been busy throughout the lockdown; over 220 claims have been processed due to the cancellation and postponements of shows, with a potential payout of over £1m.

We know that everyone is missing rehearsals and being involved, so in April NODA launched NODA Training: A series of online workshops and videos in everything from performing to backstage to society management. To date over 2500 people have taken part in the courses that have been delivered by some of the industries best practitioners. Courses have included Mask Making for beginners, Vocal Techniques for Performers,

one-to-one singing lessons, stage combat and The Business of Amateur Theatre. Pre-recorded videos are still available on our website for you to peruse at your leisure - [noda.org.uk/training](http://noda.org.uk/training).

This year NODA Theatre Summer School was due to be held at the Walsall Campus of the University of Wolverhampton for the first time. Unfortunately, this too has had to be cancelled. However, instead, we have launched the first NODA Theatre Summer E-school, running four different pathways and incorporating all 15 original courses.

In preparation for reopening, we have been supporting societies to update their policies like Health and Safety and Child Protection. It is never a fun task to update policies, but having these in place will help your society in the long run. To assist in this, NODA Safe have launched online training in a variety of areas at a discounted cost to members.

There is still much debate on whether pantomime season will take place this year. Anyone who has already purchased pantomime rights from NODA are able to move the dates of their production without penalty. By the autumn, we will have launched our brand new website dedicated to pantomimes. The new site will give members access to the most up to date scripts and a completely online licensing process - but don't worry, we are always on the end of the phone to help!

Along with all the changes and online programmes and support we've been giving members, we are extending all society memberships that were due to expire on December 31st to now expire on 31st March. From then on 1st April will continue to be their renewal date indefinitely. We hope our members see this as our way of showing how much we understand and sympathise with the financial situation they are facing, and that we will continue to do our best for our members.

Remember, we are always at the end of the phone, drop us an email or visit our social media pages. Get in touch with societies in your area, amateur theatre is a family and in these times it is always important to lean on family.

NODA Head Office - +44 (0) 1733 374 790

Website - [noda.org.uk](http://noda.org.uk)

Email - [info@noda.org.uk](mailto:info@noda.org.uk)

Facebook - [facebook.com/nationaloperaticdramaticassociation](https://facebook.com/nationaloperaticdramaticassociation)

*"I regard the theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being."*

*Thornton Wilder*



# noda SAFE

## Online health and safety training

Members £18 / Non Members £24 per course

Basic Ladder Awareness  
Control of Substances Hazardous To Health  
CPD Asbestos Awareness Training  
Falls Prevention - Working at Heights  
Fire Safety  
Fire Warden  
GDPR  
Health and Safety Level 2  
Legionella Awareness  
Level 2 Food Safety Training  
Lone and Remote Workers (Personal Security)  
Manual Handling  
Risk Assessments  
Slips and Trips

[noda.org.uk/noda-safe-training](https://noda.org.uk/noda-safe-training)



# noda Training

Mask Making, Dance Routine in 1 Hour, Stage Combat,  
Vocal Regimes and Costume Design

[noda.org.uk/training](https://noda.org.uk/training)





CONCORD  
THEATRICALS



# The show must go online

## All about digital performing rights

Theatre can be a source of entertainment, hope and community spirit – and Concord Theatricals is committed to supporting the theatre community as best we can during these unprecedented times.

It takes hard work, imagination and dedication to stage shows in town halls, theatres, community centres and schools across the country, and the sheer enthusiasm of our amateur theatre customers is something that our team hugely admires. We appreciate that your summer musicals and outdoor whodunnits and end-of-season shows were diary dates to look forward to, and so, until we can be in auditoriums together again, we want to help our customers to keep making theatre happen in a way that is safe, practical and enjoyable.

With thousands of plays and musicals across the Rodgers and Hammerstein, Samuel French and Tams-Witmark catalogues, Concord Theatricals' licensing team is working closely with our authors' representatives to make shows available for virtual performances and digital broadcasts. As we primarily don't hold the

rights for titles – rather, we represent and license them – we're talking to authors and agents to gain approvals where possible. If there is a particular title that you want to perform in your living rooms in a socially distanced way, and share over Zoom with your friends and families and communities, please ask us. We're taking great care to ensure your requests are heard and to provide you with clear information on fees to help with the decision-making process. When a title isn't available for online performance, our licensing team will be more than happy to personally recommend alternatives.

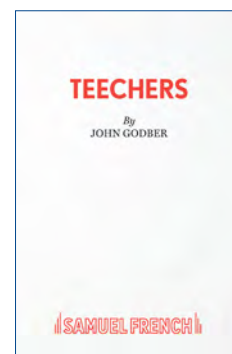
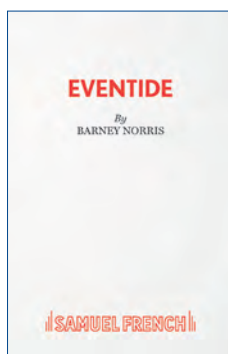
We're pleased to announce that there are some titles that have been fully confirmed as available for virtual performances by amateur groups. From classic musicals such as *The Wizard of Oz (RSC Version)* to much-loved amateur plays including John Godber's *Teechers*, as well as newer titles from the likes of

Katy Brand, Satinder Chohan and Barney Norris, we're expanding that list of approvals every day.

So whether you're looking for a two-hander or a laugh-out-loud comedy, a period murder mystery or an uplifting musical featuring all your favourite songs, we encourage you to be creative. We can't wait to see the results.

Browse our catalogue at [concordtheatricals.co.uk](http://concordtheatricals.co.uk) and contact our licensing team on [amateur@concordtheatricals.co.uk](mailto:amateur@concordtheatricals.co.uk) for advice and inspiration on titles available for digital performances.

NODA members can get 10% off playscripts and theatre books online at [concordtheatricals.co.uk](http://concordtheatricals.co.uk). To claim, email [customerservices@concordtheatricals.co.uk](mailto:customerservices@concordtheatricals.co.uk)



# Have you got my good side?

## Top tips for recording online videos

With the world of theatre going online and groups recording songs from shows for social media; we have sought out tips on the best way to record videos without specialist equipment.

When you watch streamed productions like NT Live or even *Hamilton*, thousands if not millions have been spent on equipment and weeks are spent editing the video ready for the public. Those sorts of budgets are out of reach for most organisations, but how can amateur groups produce high quality videos for streaming? These days, a phone camera is as good a quality as some professional equipment. All you need is to follow a few easy steps to give you a great quality video for your project.

### Set Up

Make sure you use a neutral location. If you are filming at home, find a space without photos or other personal items in the background. When recording, let anyone else in the house know (including the dog) as you don't want the kids to start calling you or the dog barking! Think about the room's natural reverb and what effect you want to achieve. The bathroom and kitchen have hard surfaces so sound bounces around and can make you sound like you are underwater. Living rooms and bedrooms tend to have a lot more soft furnishings which absorb the sound and will give you a drier recording.

It is important that you can be heard clearly. In theatre you are taught to project and how to use a microphone correctly. In a home video set up, you probably won't have access to radio

microphones, so you have to rely on the camera's inbuilt microphone. Do some test recordings to see what sort of speech or singing level you need and try your quietest and loudest parts of the piece to make sure you can be heard or that it doesn't distort. If you are recording a song, it is best to have the backing track playing through a headphone on one device and record yourself singing with another. This way the track can be added to your vocal without distortion of being recorded again.

Make use of natural light as front lighting. It will give you a natural look on camera, but timing is then imperative. You lose the effect if it is dull outside or getting dark. Or make use of lights in the room ie table lights and overhead lighting. These can create effects similar to stage lighting to set the mood. Experiment to get the effect you'd like.

The main thing is to make sure that you can be seen and heard on screen. Do some screen tests in different settings to see which works best.

### Recording

Unless told by your director otherwise, record in landscape, it gives the person cutting your video together a lot more flexibility and looks a lot better on screen. Ideally have your camera/phone on a tripod. These can be picked up from

Amazon very cheaply and will mean that your video is still and not wobbling. Also, remember that the camera is much closer to you than the audience usually are. Stage and screen acting are two different styles, so make sure you have enough time to change your performance if you don't like your first attempt.

### Editing

Once you have recorded your video, you will need to edit it ready for publishing. There are lots of free apps available for video editing. I particularly like iMovie, but that is restricted to Apple users. Adding sound effects, backing tracks, title slides, captions, can be great additions, but remember that often, less is more. These small touches at the right times make all the difference in making your video look professional. Before you export your finished video, have a think of what platform you are going to upload it to - Facebook, YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram. Each one has different video quality specifications, for some you will have to reduce the quality and others will accept high resolution videos.

The main thing to remember is to test, test, test. You can create amazing videos, but you need to dedicate the time to it. It is no different from dressing your stage set and rehearsing your show. Getting these tips under your belt will help your video be the best it can be!



# Do you know what benefits you get being a member of NODA?



## Pantomime Scripts and Licences

With over 150 different scripts, whatever your cast, whatever your venue - we have the script for you and as a member you will receive a discount on performance rights!

[pantoscripts.org.uk](http://pantoscripts.org.uk)

## Need A DBS Check?

You can apply for DBS Checks through NODA

Contact Head Office for more information



## PROGRAMME AND POSTER COMPETITION

Have you got an amazing poster or programme for your show?

Enter it into the National Poster and Programme Competition

[noda.org.uk/ourservices](http://noda.org.uk/ourservices)



## HAVE YOU BEEN INVOLVED WITH AMATEUR THEATRE FOR A LONG TIME?

You might be eligible for a Long Service Medal

Awards range from 10 years service right up to 70 years

[noda.org.uk/longservice](http://noda.org.uk/longservice)

## REGIONAL SUPPORT

Advertise your event on the NODA Website

Show Reports from your Regional Rep

View your show reports online

Access to your region's social media to share ideas, ask for help, source props/costumes etc.

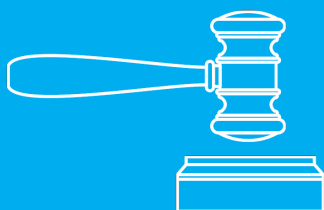
Access to Regional Conferences and Workshops

## Need Information?

You will find lots of factsheets on our website to help with running your society.

These include:

- Model Child Protection Policy
- Corporation Tax & VAT
- Fundraising
- Equal Opportunities
- GDPR
- Gift Aid
- Stage Weapons
- Any many more!



## Need Legal Advice?

As part of your membership, societies can get assistance from our Legal Helpline

To use this service please email a full explanation of your request to

[info@noda.org.uk](mailto:info@noda.org.uk)

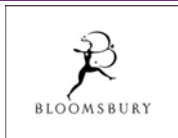
## NODA THEATRE SUMMER SCHOOL

Exclusive access to spaces on our yearly Theatre Summer School

# noda.org.uk

## The font of information for amateur theatre

# noda Corporate Partners



## Bloomsbury Publishing

Independent publishing house

[bloomsbury.com](http://bloomsbury.com)



## Concord Theatricals

Collections include: Samuel French,  
Tams Whitmark,  
Rogers & Hammerstein  
[concordtheatricals.com](http://concordtheatricals.com)



## Creative Tax Reliefs Limited

Helping creative companies claim  
the tax credits they deserve

[creativetaxreliefs.com](http://creativetaxreliefs.com)



## International Theatre & Music

Family friendly musicals by  
Piers Chater Robinson

[itmshows.com](http://itmshows.com)



## Playstage Senior

Drama scripts for older actors

[playsforadults.com](http://playsforadults.com)



## Scenery Hire Scotland

Scenery and prop hire

[sceneryhirescotland.co.uk](http://sceneryhirescotland.co.uk)



## Stage Lighting Services

Theatrical lighting and staging hire  
and sales

[stagelightservices.com](http://stagelightservices.com)



## Stagescripts

Drama and musical theatre  
rightsholder

[stagescripts.com](http://stagescripts.com)



## The Musical Company

Musicals by Andrew Lloyd Webber

[themusicalcompany.com](http://themusicalcompany.com)



## Theatre Tees

Personalised clothing from show  
t-shirts to merchandise

[theatretees.co.uk](http://theatretees.co.uk)



## Theatrical Rights Worldwide

Represent Broadway shows, West End  
shows, and a wide variety of Theatre  
for Young Audiences musicals.  
[theatricalrights.co.uk](http://theatricalrights.co.uk)



## Theatrical Traders Association

Everything you need to put on a  
show

[theatricaltradersassociation.co.uk](http://theatricaltradersassociation.co.uk)



# noda

## Long Service Awards

Visit [noda.org.uk/awards](http://noda.org.uk/awards) to apply today



10 Year Badge



15 Year Badge



20 Year Badge



25 Year Badge



30 Year Badge



35 Year Badge



40 Year Badge



45 Year Badge



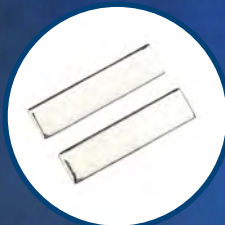
50 Year Badge



60 Year Badge



25 Year Medal



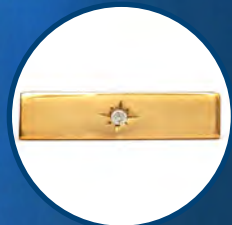
Silver Bar



50 Year Medal



Gold Bar



Diamond Bar



55 Year Pin



60 Year Pin



65 Year Pin



70 Year Pin



Individual Member



Society Life Member



Youth Award



Commendation Award



# What lockdown has meant to Scenery Hire Scotland

## NODA Corporate Partner

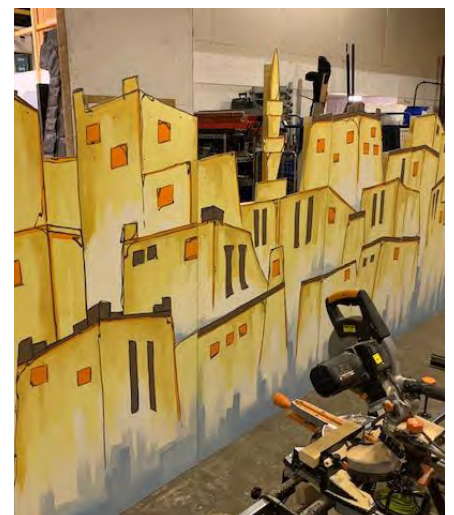
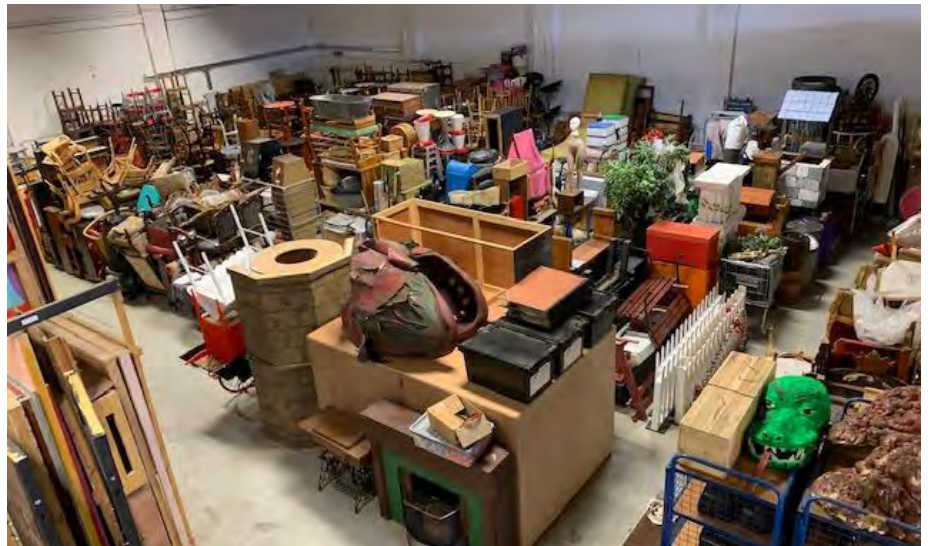
It's been a rollercoaster of a year for all of us at Scenery Hire Scotland: we had been rapidly growing as a new business only for it to come to a grinding halt with the lockdown. Last January, we acquired the scenery hire business as it felt like a natural expansion of Prop Hire Scotland which we started in 2013. However, it became obvious early on that we had outgrown the three small industrial units we occupied at Springburn in Glasgow.

We secured new premises in Maryhill, but were then faced with the huge challenge of moving during an extremely busy Autumn season. We had one week in October without any shows and we successfully moved the majority of our business over in that week.

The new warehouse has made our set production easier. We have a larger workshop, we can have carpenters working at the same time as scenic artists, and we are able to put up new sets during construction allowing customers to see the work in progress. We have more room to display our props and our stock is more accessible to customers who visit our premises. Since our move we've built five new sets including *Made in Dagenham*, *HMS Pinafore* and *9 to 5*.

During lockdown we've been able to catalogue and sort out our stock and we'll soon start production on new sets for 2021.

We're open for business – just get in touch with us  
[info@sceneryhirescotland.co.uk](mailto:info@sceneryhirescotland.co.uk)  
and find out how we can help you with your next production.





# How have societies been keeping in touch when they cannot rehearse or perform?

## We are indeed missing the theatre life!

### NODA East

Breakaway Theatre Company (St Albans) were preparing to perform the hilarious and heart-warming *Ladies' Day* at the Maltings Art Theatre, but...

So, missing the theatre life, the cast performed Amanda Whittington's acclaimed comedy online. The play follows the story of four fishwives from Hull whose fortunes change when they manage to get tickets to *Ladies' Day* at Royal Ascot the year it relocated to York. It's a great mix of hilarious comedy and raw sadness, with true-to-life characters.

Director Jill Hardman said that the private virtual performance had been a good way to mark the production and the

cast were now even more excited about putting the show on. *"It was the strangest opening night I have ever been to,"* she said, *"but it was wonderful to see the cast bring the characters to life again. We are planning to perform the show as soon as we are able."*

Clare Waller from the Breakaway Theatre Company said: *"We have also had a couple of company Zoom calls, including one for Shakespeare's birthday, where members read their favourite monologues, and have an upcoming one on the theme of 'Lightening the Mood', giving members the opportunity to read funny or uplifting pieces of their choice."*



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## Virtual Theatre in lockdown

### NODA London



The Richings Players, like many other not-for-profit organisations across the UK, have had to postpone or cancel activities due to the ongoing restrictions on public gatherings. However, as one door closes, another opens.

Starting at the end of June, they embarked on *The Facebook Season*. Showcasing what they do best - acting...virtually of course, with one-act plays performed and recorded by their members through the video communications platform Zoom and edited to be premiered on Facebook. They were free to watch and Richings Players felt this was a great way to continue what they have been doing for over 90 years; entertaining the people of Iwer.

## An online one act play in lockdown

### NODA North

Dryburn Theatrical Workshop had only cast their summer musical production of 'Legally Blonde' just two weeks before it had to be postponed. Since then, the group has been keeping in touch with members via online social events such as quizzes and game shows. More recently, however, they have released a one-act play, written especially by a local writer and friend of the group, Tom Casling, which is designed to be performed online. 'Solitaire' features a storyline which takes place during the lockdown, making it an ideal project for our members who have missed their hobby so much.

## Fylde Coast youth theatre fighting back at the lockdown

### NODA North West



Even though both of this year's shows, *High School Musical Jr* and *Bare*, a pop opera have been pushed back to 2021 with dates still pending, they have continued to have their weekly rehearsals. They have also had help from leading theatre stars Julie Atherton and Lauren Byrne from the musical *Six*.

*"It's been amazing being able to have big names teaching our students, it's really given our cast members something different to look forward to. As we are based on the Fylde Coast it's rare we get to work with big names,"* says founder, Debbie Parkinson.

FCYT are now waiting to be told they can resume rehearsals in the studios again and get to work creating more stage magic!

## Selfie Cinderella

### NODA North East



The invite went out from our producer Jo Sykes to members of St Giles with St Mary's Panto Society to get involved in a rather different type of performance – a pantomime filmed at home during the lockdown. She had found a *Selfie Cinderella* script written by Warren McWilliams who kindly gave us the rights to perform and record.

Around thirty enthusiastic society members volunteered to take part and worked very hard to pull this off with the support of their families. There were some additions to the original script to reflect our Panto Society and to involve some of the people you don't usually see on stage (our front of house and backstage teams). We also included some social references to these challenging times, including the use of social media, TikTok dances and social distancing visits. With no access to costumes, scenery or props, the cast had

to be creative with what they could find around the house. We even held a full rehearsal using Zoom.

Most importantly, though, the younger members and future members were able to get involved. This was amazing for me as it meant that my one-year-old daughter Poppy could appear in her first-ever panto! (even though she has to wait a few years before she's old enough to be on stage). I played the fairy godmother performing magic on Poppy who was dressed as a pumpkin, a mouse and a monkey for the transformation scene, whilst my husband recorded us on my phone. We all had loads of fun filming, and it certainly helped to make our lockdown more memorable! Our clips were all emailed to Jo, who did a fantastic job editing it all together before uploading to YouTube in 3 Acts.

Sarah Roberts

Has your society been keeping in touch online?

Have you performed your show online?

Share your experiences on your Regional Facebook Page.



# Social ‘quiztancing’ - it’s all happening in District 2

NODA Scotland



Jen and I ran a weekly musical theatre quiz for all societies in District Two. This quickly grew to include others: Angus, Fife, Glasgow and more. In the end, we had 400+ members taking part, others dipping in or just watching the night unfold.

On the surface, the quiz seemed simple - testing knowledge

of MT, stars, songs and theatres. Then we introduced “bonus rounds”... These consisted of a task; the end result was either a picture or video that contestants would post on the page. These bonus rounds would challenge people’s ingenuity, imagination, resourcefulness and knowledge. For instance, we asked, “Let us see you defying gravity”.

The resulting images and videos of various witches, dogs and people on household cleaning items were impressive, as was a drunken flop onto a bed and a few people on top of sheds! All produced and uploaded in 5 minutes! One classic opening scene was recreated by a family, animal masks, music and the family cat was “lion kinged” up a ladder! Their hastily constructed barricade in the garden with flags and flames was a rousing finale to the quiz. Other bonus rounds didn’t quite go according to our plan. After being asked to “decorate a cake” (after a *Waitress*-based question), one contestant decided to decorate “his buns” candle and all. We have not included this picture as we are a family-based organisation!

Craig and Jen Shearer

## May I have a word?

NODA South East



On 16th March 2020, Mr Johnson told us to “avoid” bars, pubs and clubs, which was annoying for me because there is nothing I like more than going clubbing? (NOT). But there it was, the stark reality that slowly, the country was going to close-down. For the rest of that week we, at HATS (Herstmonceux Amateur Theatrical Society), were due to do a full run of *Madagascar* with our Young HATS.

We managed to do the dress rehearsal, and then the whole thing was cancelled. A few days later, the word “avoid” was removed and “banned” was inserted. Not your ‘live’ band, but ‘you must not go anywhere’ banned.

I decided that, as a society, we needed to support each other through this difficult time, so suggested we revitalise our members-only Facebook page and use it as a chat page for our group. I suggested

that we all posted what we were doing all day and any other fun and frolics which would interest others. The major rule established was that it should be a page full of fun and cheer, but moaning, generally, was not allowed. Each day I set out to write a blog. I started each report with Good Morning and then I put day? of 98 and then continued into a small report of what I had done the day before, any comments about news reports and then proceeded to wind up the members of the society with little jokes about what they had reported on the day before. When I started, I listed Day 1 of 98, 98 days being the 14 weeks we were told to expect. On 21st June, we completed Day 98 of 98. I never expected to write a report for 98 days. It got slightly longer, ripped off, as nicely as possible, more people and it got more comments and return jokes back as the time went on. We have had so much fun. Many

members of the society have ended up with relevant nicknames attached to the silly things they have done or said. Several have suggested after this is all over that they are actually going to get a T-shirt printed with their virus names on it.

I have written 76,443 words, we have held a quiz each week, we got together via Zoom to watch previous shows once a week, each day we have set a daily task for people to achieve, which has included videos of them dancing, juggling and singing, be warned, most of us can’t do any of these, it’s a myth. We have all learnt what Zoom is and we have all learnt how to support each other through difficult times. We have, in some form, made contact through text, call, Zoom or email to just about every member of our society. Some have found this time very difficult, and we have tried to help them through it. Many have said without HATS and the chat we have created, it would have been even more difficult. We are still going, we are still here, and we are, as a group, proud of what we have achieved together.

Chris Thompson  
Chair of HATS, The Gaffer (apparently)

# Cirencester Theatre Company produce their own production...online

## NODA South West

For Cirencester Theatre Company, alongside many drama groups, lockdown meant 'pressing pause' on 'normal' activities. Regular meetings were replaced with virtual ones, such as weekly quizzes or play-reads. During one such weekly play-read in May, group member Lesley Scoble-Ash suggested 'someone should write a play about performing online!'

Katy Sorensen and Caroline Jalili, who have both written stage-plays for the group to perform, set about writing *The Show Must Go Online*, a 5-part comedy series about a theatre group (the 'Cotswold Drama Dreamers') who decide to perform their upcoming stage-production online. The series follows the group from first meeting, through rehearsals, to livestream, combining the dynamics of amdram, the peculiarities of lockdown life, and the inevitable technical challenges of virtual performance.

*"It hasn't been easy,"* says Caroline, co-writer and producer. *"Most of the tech jokes we wrote into the series were issues we experienced ourselves when producing it!"*

*"We've learned a lot,"* says Katy, co-writer and director. *"My only regret is not writing more characters. With so much interest*



*from our members, it was disappointing not to cast everyone. So, we've started writing series two! We hope that this will give others a fun theatre fix during these difficult times."*

Carole Gray, who plays 'Babs' in the series, says 'It's been a great distraction during these times and extra special as we can't put on our December production.'

Sue Poole, who plays 'Ann', adds *"It's been a great experience all round - learning lots of new tech skills, as well as the opportunity to take part in a novel concept."*

Katy and Caroline plan to publish the scripts so that other theatre groups facing the same challenges can enjoy

producing the play. *"Even after lockdown is lifted, theatres may be affected for a long time. Stage performance may not be feasible. Many amdram groups include older people who may continue to shield. We want to offer groups like ours something to work on together, something that brings them as much fun and laughter as it brought us. And something they can showcase to their audiences whilst we wait for life to return to normal, whatever that looks like."*

So get ready to 'press play' on theatre again and visit the Cirencester Theatre Company channel on YouTube.com.

## Singing to stay together

### NODA West Midlands

Whilst not being able to rehearse in lockdown, Market Drayton Amateur Operatics and Dramatics Society have stayed connected by running online virtual choir sessions.

Matthew Baker, the choirmaster of the Little Voices Choir, moved the choir sessions online and it has been a hit. The online sessions have brought the society together, even gaining other members who wouldn't usually attend the choir sessions.

To keep things interesting, they also have a dress-up theme every night, which I'm sure adds a smile to people's faces in these uncertain times. This idea has given members of the society and other



societies a chance to communicate and enjoy socialising with friends from the safety of their own homes and is a true

example of a society pulling together to get themselves through this pandemic with a smile on their faces.



# Sutton Green Hut Award

## NODA North East

A Youth Theatre's weekly drama session on Zoom saw a surprise for adult helper and former youth member Jay Knights.

It was Jay's 21st birthday that day – and NODA District rep Sally Holmes made a virtual visit to Sutton's Green Hut Youth Theatre to present Jay with a NODA 10-year medal. The presentation was arranged by the parent group, Sutton's Green Hut Theatre Company, after COVID-19 caused the cancellation of its VE Day show and there was no other opportunity to present the medal before Jay leaves for university this autumn.

After the presentation, Sally joined the Youth Theatre's exuberant members for drama games and improvisation, adapted from the group's regular Tuesday evening sessions in the society's real green hut. The youngsters and their parents have been loving the sessions because they

offer a welcome break from lockdown and home-schooling.

Jay has been involved with both Green Hut and KYDZ Keighley Youth Theatre since she was a young child. She first took to the stage with Green Hut as an unborn baby, as her heavily pregnant mother Katrina performed in *Oliver!* She returned at six in *Carousel* and has been in many pantomimes and musicals since. Her writing and directing debut with Green Hut was cut short when the VE Day show was cancelled.

Over 13 years at KYDZ, Jay has moved from performer to leader, writing and directing major musical productions as well as mentoring young singers. In advance of studying for a Television and Film Production degree at university, Jay is currently helping create films online with the 24 young members of KYDZ.

The Youth Theatre was forced to cancel its planned July stage musical due to the virus pandemic and is instead planning a concert on YouTube. It is running four online sessions each week: creative sessions for each age group and a vitally important get-together for the entire membership.

The youngsters, aged 9 to 19, are not only rehearsing songs and sketches but using mobile phones, laptops and Zoom to create two films: a hard-hitting drama about a school shooting and a comedy about home-schooled students blackmailing their teacher.

Members, leaders and the tech team, while hugely disappointed at cancelling live performances, have relished the chance to make the most of the new medium.

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# NODA North West winner hits the West End

A double winner of NODA's 'Best Leading Man in a North West Youth Production' made his West End debut in February in the heart of London's theatreland!

Jack McNeill of Carlisle was a member of Cumbria's StagedRight Youth Theatre for ten years. StagedRight was set up in 2004, by his parents, David and Sallie, as there was nowhere for an eight-year-old Jack to tread the boards.

Jack's dad, David, said: *"Since a very early age Jack wanted to perform and appeared aged four in his first professional pantomime as a mini Wishy-Washy. Aged eight, he was in a local production of Oliver! and after the show wanted to do more: as did most of the youngsters in the cast. Unfortunately, Carlisle didn't offer anything for children, so Sallie and I decided to set up StagedRight".*

StagedRight began with 50 members hiring the local sports centre every Sunday, and their first production was *Barnum* with Jack playing Tom Thumb. It was decided that StagedRight would aspire to be the best in the area so Jack, like everyone else, had to audition for roles – something that continues today.

Over the years, Jack played a variety of parts for StagedRight winning Best Leading Male for Bill Snipson in *Me & My Girl* and again for Don Lockwood in *Singin' in the Rain*.

Turning 18, Jack began to audition for

theatre schools and having received three offers, opted for Trinity Laban Conservatoire in London.

Before graduating, Jack was fortunate to receive a few offers for representation and pays tribute to his chosen agent for securing several auditions for high profile productions.

Jack graduated from Trinity Laban in 2017, with a first in musical theatre and went straight into professional work. Since graduating he has had eight professional jobs including a London production of *The Hired Man*, two UK theatre tours, a tour of the *Far East* and two pantomimes in Nottingham for Qdos Entertainment.

Jack had just come off the Theatre Royal, Nottingham stage where he was playing Dandini with Les Dennis, Conor McIntyre and Gareth Gates in *Cinderella* when his agent rang to say he had been cast in the London production of the hit musical, *The Book of Mormon*.

*"I was over the moon," said Jack. "The audition process takes many months and to find out just before Christmas that I had been offered a 12-month contract in The Book of Mormon was a dream come true. I was unable to tell anyone until the official January announcement and yet on my day off from panto, had to commute back to London for costume fittings".*

*The Book of Mormon* is a musical comedy with music, lyrics and book by Trey

Parker, Robert Lopez, and Matt Stone. It follows two young missionaries as they attempt to preach the Mormon faith to the inhabitants of a remote Ugandan village.

The writers, Parker and Stone, are best known for creating the animated comedy *South Park* whilst Lopez co-wrote the music for the musical *Avenue Q*.

*The Book of Mormon* will be Jack's biggest challenge. Having finished panto in Nottingham on the Sunday, he began intense rehearsals in London for 'Mormon' on the Monday. On Monday 3rd February, he opened in his first West End role. *"I play Elder Grant plus a few other roles in the show," said Jack, "to say too much would spoil the surprise. It is a fantastic show to be part of with great songs and wonderful choreography".*

David added, *"Amateur theatre is a stepping-stone for aspiring actors of all ages. StagedRight is proud to have so many StagedRight graduates enjoying professional success including Matt Pagan who won Britain's Got Talent as part of the musical theatre group 'Collabro'".*

Since 2004, StagedRight has grown to have more than 200 members and are based in luxury rehearsal studios in Carlisle's historic Shaddon Mill. They have three studios, a technical area and superb wardrobe department thanks to the generous sponsorship of Story Homes.





# Panto Scripts

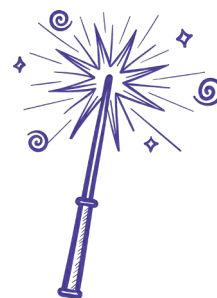




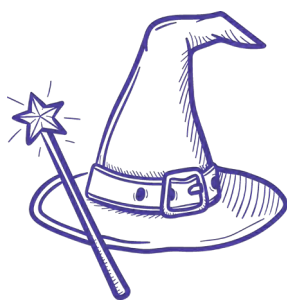
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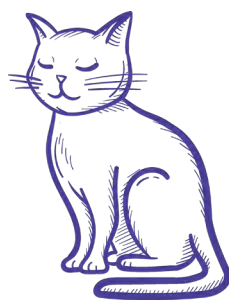
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# Time of my Life...in the round

NODA East Midlands



*Time of My Life* Credit Richard Briers - mp photography

Theatre in the round is something of a novelty. But I would recommend it to anyone who is excited by theatre. For me its great strength is that no-one is more than a relatively few metres from the on-stage action and the 'fourth wall' disappears, meaning that the audience can become totally drawn into whatever it is they're watching. Of course, there are significant challenges for directors, actors (who have to get used to having their backs to the audience sometimes) and especially designers, who must solve the problem of creating a setting for a production without the ubiquitous 'flat' - or anything that is big and vertical!

Theatre in the round started in the USA in the 1940s.

While still relatively rare in the UK, there are several theatres in the round, for example, The Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, which sits inside the grand, classically styled former cotton exchange in an ultra-modern module. Well worth a visit, even if, rather sadly, you don't get to see a production there.

Equally famous, but this time for its 'writer in residence', Sir Alan Ayckbourn, is the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough, with the audience seated on each side of a rectangle which occupies a former cinema. All of Ayckbourn's plays - around one every year - premiere at this theatre.

When I read the review of the Retford Little Theatre's production of Alan

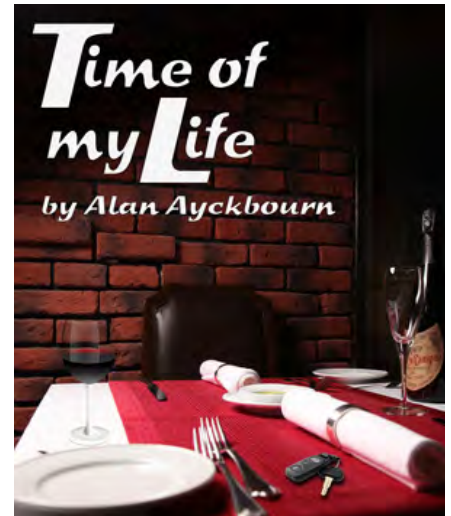
Ayckbourn's *Time of my Life* in the round, I just had to ask producer Alan Mitchell to write about his experience in producing the play in this unusual and challenging format for an amateur society.

Alex Wood - Regional Editor

Ayckbourn's original 1992 production left such an impression on me that, given the opportunity to produce it, I jumped at the chance.

Produced in this format, the play is not without problems, but my dedicated cast and crew rose to the challenge. Retford Little Theatre converts, with a bit of manpower, into the round, seating 160. Sightlines in the round are always problematical set wise, as there are three seated table acting areas, it can be somewhat static. Careful plotting and movement ensured the cast interacted with all sides of the auditorium as much as possible, by shifting in their seats or by a turn of the head. A good lighting plot was crucial to define the three individual acting areas. Sound provided time shift and atmospheric music also enhanced the show. Props provided numerous plates of food/drinks in various stages of consumption as well as a trolley loaded with tempting (mock) desserts.

The play, set in a restaurant at the end of a birthday party, follows three timelines with one couple going into their future, one couple into their past and one couple staying in the present, while hardly



Credit David Cox of Retford Little Theatre

leaving the stage! One actor plays the owner and four waiters flitting between tables and timelines, playing three different waiters in one short scene! We used eight wigs and numerous costume changes throughout the play to portray the different characters.

The play ends with the actors arriving at the restaurant, before the party starts, requiring the main table to be reset. This was achieved by the set builders creating a swivel table with napkins, glasses and place-settings firmly screwed to the 'bottom'; when turned in seconds, the gasp of amazement showed that we got it right!

All the cast enjoyed the play and the challenge to flesh out their characters to show 'what lurks beneath', as is Ayckbourn's forte. The audience picked up on the hidden depths - even to the extent of a rewardingly audible, "The Bitch" from one of them! The proximity of the audience gave an extra dimension, sometimes scary, as the actors had nowhere to hide. Because of the intimacy, the actors had to keep their voices up and not fall into quiet table chat.

With all its pitfalls, was it worth it? From the enthusiasm of the cast and crew, the audience reaction and my perspective, after many years in this business, I think it was the "Time of My Life!"

Alan Mitchell

# We're busier than ever in lockdown

## NODA North

The decision to close all UK theatres due to the COVID-19 outbreak hit DarlingtonOS hard. The news came less than five weeks away from opening night of *Strictly Musicals 3* - the third in the musical theatre revue-style shows that have proved a great hit with members and audiences alike since performing *Strictly Musicals 1* back in 2013.

The committee's main focus over the first couple of weeks of lockdown was, of course, to ensure all bookers received a refund, but also being offered the option to donate some or all of their ticket price to the company to assist us through what could be a long and difficult period. To our amazement, the total offered back to us by our generous audience members was over £3000.

Naturally, during this time, we also needed to look at all avenues of financial assistance open to us as we have a long-term lease on our rehearsal venue and still had to meet our monthly running costs. We also had our members to think about - keeping them informed and engaged. Zoom was the natural place to allow members to meet up and socially integrate without leaving home. We ran weekly 'rehearsals' learning new dance routines and going over others that were in *Strictly 3*. Quiz nights, race nights and general chat nights helped us keep in touch and our minds active.

Never a company to stand still, we soon instigated a virtual chorus project to present a video of 'One Day More' - difficult enough at the best of times, but individuals filming in their back bedroom, under the stairs or in the garden was a technical challenge we were willing to face. Add to that a virtual dance project to 'From Now On' from *The Greatest Showman* - these two projects kept members busy for the next couple of weeks. These videos have now been viewed over 30,000 times on Facebook. It was time for the next project.

We are currently in the middle of the most challenging and exciting of projects - *Strictly Lockdown*. A CD of 18 musical theatre tracks recorded in lockdown - a mix of duets, small groups and full company numbers, again recorded



Photos from rehearsals of *Strictly Musicals 3*



individually at home with each individual line being mixed to create something truly special. Weeks of planning has ensured the right licences are in place, the right mix of songs was chosen, backing tracks specially commissioned and online rehearsals arranged. Profits from sales of the CD will go to the main NHS fund as our way of thanking them for the truly amazing work they have done during this pandemic. Funds will also go towards supporting DarlingtonOS to ensure we can perform again at the Darlington Hippodrome once theatres can welcome audiences once more. *Strictly Lockdown* is due to go on sale in early July.



Our fantastic wardrobe team has been busy also, creating bags and masks for the NHS and also creating funky face masks for members to purchase using off-cuts of material used to create previous show costumes. There's *Legally Blonde* pink masks, Glittery *Priscilla* masks and 60's retro *Hairspray* masks; their creativity has been amazing.

So, what's next? We are already in negotiations to film a musical theatre review production to be streamed on a pay-to-view basis once we can meet indoors safely in small groups. Watch this space!





Rc-Annie Ltd has a passion and commitment to training and works with many Theatres, Drama Schools, Universities and other organisations in offering Industry Standard Training. We are excited to offer these courses to NODA Members.

**Rc-Annie Ltd is the UK's leading Theatrical Violence Company. Established in 2005, by Rachel Bown-Williams and Ruth Cooper-Brown who are 2 of the UK's most prolific Fight Directors.**

Recent Theatre Credits Include: *The Welkin & Three Sisters* (National Theatre); *[BLANK]* (Donmar Warehouse); *King John* (Royal Shakespeare Company); *God of Carnage* (Theatre Royal Bath); *The Prince of Egypt* (The Dominion Theatre, West End); *Woman Beware Women*, *Macbeth* & *As You Like It* (Shakespeare's Globe).



## How to prepare for intimate and violent moments

24th August 2020  
7pm to 9:30pm

Working with Rachel Bown-Williams and Ruth Cooper-Brown on how to establish safe working practices when working with intimate and violent moments in a production.

### Who is it for?

Directors, theatre makers, stage managers, technicians and performers aged 16 and over.

### What is it?

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- Performance approaches and procedures
- Promoting safe spaces for creative work
- Aftercare and ongoing practices
- Ending with a Q&A opportunity

### What do you need?

Laptop to receive the live streaming course and something to take notes on.

### How much does it cost?

£90 per person. Use Discount code NODA for 20% off!

## Weaponry for theatre

31st August 2020  
7pm to 9pm

Learn how to make the best choices when it comes to weapons.  
Discover what you can use in production (excluding Theatrical Firearms)



### Who is it for?

Stage managers, technicians, directors and performers aged 16 and over.

### What is it?

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- Weaponry identification
- Anatomy of the sword and a potted sword history
- Rehearsal room etiquette & safety
- Sourcing weaponry, transportation and storage
- Ending with a Q&A opportunity

### What do you need?

Laptop to receive the live streaming course, something to take notes on and an additional device: phone or tablet to view the handout/worksheet which will be emailed to you before the course begins.

### How much does it cost?

£90 per person. Use Discount code NODA for 20% off!



## Theatrical handguns

7th September 2020  
7pm to 9:30pm

Using theatrical handguns in performance. All you need to know to help you make informed choices. Rc-Annie are proud to have been instrumental in creating safer theatrical handgun practices in the UK.

### Who is it for?

Directors, theatre makers, stage managers, technicians and performers aged 16 and over.

### What is it?

- An online live streamed 2.5/3hr course.
- It is designed to help you find your own comfort level while dealing with all theatrical guns, both physically and legally.
- UK gun law, definitions, paperwork procedures and safety protocols.
- Sourcing weaponry, transportation and storage.
- Safe handling, safe staging.
- Gun shaped choices. The anatomy of a bullet, semi auto and revolver.
- Ending with Q&A

### What do you need?

Laptop to receive the live streaming course, plus you will need either an additional note taking device or be able to print off the handout/worksheet which will be emailed to you before the course begins.

### How much does it cost?

£90 per person. Use Discount code NODA for 20% off!

## Sblood FX

13th September 2020  
2pm to 4pm

An online messy, fun interactive exploration of making and deploying blood FX. Please note the contents of this live streaming workshop are subject to copyright, please do not record.



### Who is it for?

Stage managers, technicians, directors and performers aged 16 and over.

### What is it?

- An live online interactive 2hr class
- Feedback and input is given throughout
- Warm up and cool down
- Opportunity for Q&A throughout and at the end

### What do you need?

- Must be in a place where they can make noise
- Enough room to stand and flail your arms about.
- Your Laptop/Ipad or Tablet and a good WiFi service to connect to us
- Don't worry about equipment! We will send you a Sblood Pack in the post prior to the workshop with all the Sblood and Equipment needed for the workshop!
- A suitable space such as a bathroom or an outside area which you can clean as blood will squirt further than you think!
- Old clothes that you don't mind getting covered in blood.
- Plastic jug
- Cleaning materials such as water or wipes

### How much does it cost?

£100 per person. Use Discount code NODA for 20% off!

NB - You must register for the Sblood FX Workshop by 4th September 2020 in order for us to post out your Sblood Pack!

To book visit <https://www.rc-annie.com/training/training-for-technicians/>

If you have any questions or queries, contact [v@rc-annie.com](mailto:v@rc-annie.com)



# Kinda Kipps

NODA North East



*Kinda Kipps - behind the scenes*

Many of us have recently enjoyed watching productions streamed from various theatres, thereby going some way towards satisfying our theatrical needs and providing some relief from any withdrawal symptoms. These were, of course, recordings of previous productions, but none have been able to show us what we have missed by the cancellation of shows still in preparation.

Never a society to sit back and allow their plans to be destroyed completely, members of Harrogate Operatic Players put together a “virtual” performance of *Kipps, the Musical*, at one of their regular Tuesday Zoom meetings and I was privileged to be invited to “attend” on the night which should have seen their dress rehearsal. At the start, we were invited to buy our programme and, yes, a limited number of these have been published.

I was quite flabbergasted at the way in which the whole thing progressed. After being summoned to join the audience already seated in a well-populated Harrogate Theatre, we saw the curtain (the first of many pieces of artwork) rise more smoothly than is sometimes the case with the real thing to reveal an opening scene which featured *Kipps* and Ann as children.

Through the foresight of some more perspicacious members of cast and

crew, many of the rehearsals had been recorded, and it was these which provided much of the content of the evening’s entertainment. Dialogue, however, was mainly “live” from each artist’s home as were many of the musical numbers, sometimes to the accompaniment of the original cast CD, but on other occasions using recordings from a rehearsal. Throughout we had ever-changing sketches of the set, with accompanying stage directions, and such attention to detail that these even reflected entrances and exits of various characters.

The cast would probably be the first to tell us that their rehearsals had been interrupted in their comparatively early days and so we should not dwell for too long on the standard of their performances. Nevertheless, it was clear that Michael Kirkby (Director) and Jim Lunt (in his debut with this society

as Musical Director) had been putting together what would have been a fine production.

That this “virtual” event was possible was due to much hard work by Steve Graham, (he had also constructed a superb vintage camera for the ‘Flash, bang, wallop’ number), Cathy Hellas and Clare Pascall with their graphics of scenery and editing of the various component parts to give the finished product such a professional appearance. Society members are now looking forward to their production of *Kinky Boots - the Musical* in 2021, and have already started to practise in suitable footwear at another of their Tuesday “gatherings”, which have proved a lovely way of keeping their members together in these difficult times.

Terry Harrison  
NE District 01 Representative



# Like father, like son

NODA North West



Graham Hawley as the Artful Dodger

Workington Amateur Operatic Society had reason to mark a special occasion back in February as the final preparations for their production of 'Oliver!' were taking place. There was something unique about this performance, not just for the show itself, but for one of its young talents, Jack Hawley.



Jack Hawley as the Artful Dodger

Jack, 13, was playing the role of the Artful Dodger, and it was a role that had a history in his family. Thirty-one years ago, back in 1989, the society performed 'Oliver!' where the role of the Artful Dodger was played by a certain Graham Hawley - Jack's father! It was the first major role for Jack who has proven the



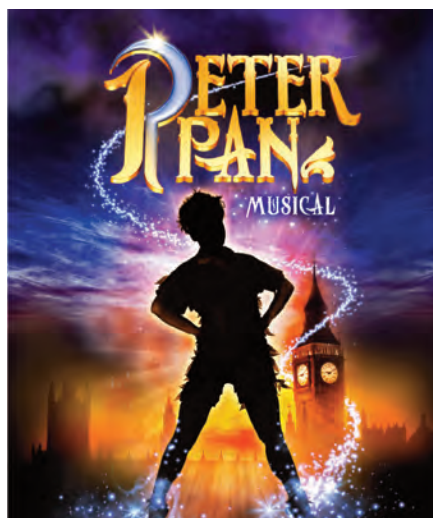
Father and son

Hawley family have a huge amount of talent for the stage as he was also joined by his younger brother, Tom, 10, who had a role as part of Fagin's gang.

The Hawley name is one to look out for in the future. Quite possibly in lights!

## A Different Staging Option Is Coming Soon...

NODA Corporate Partner



A drama teacher asked me recently if she could postpone her production of *Peter Pan, The Musical* because of the pandemic lockdown.

We have had many such requests and we have happily given all our licensees the flexibility to present their productions next year, or later if necessary.

She added, "It is such a shame that my current cast won't have the chance to perform these lovely songs or tell this timeless story, after so many weeks of rehearsals.

Do you mind if I present a 'concert version' with the children who have been working on the show throughout this term, once they return to school in the autumn?

They would be so thrilled to know that all their endeavours had not gone completely to waste."

Not only did we 'not' mind; we thought it was a fantastic idea!

### ITM Concert Conversions

Don't let 'distancing' – social or otherwise – quash your plans and ambitions.

ITM Shows is still licensing full-blown musicals, but we are going to adapt our shows to enable you to present shorter concert versions as well.

Easier to stage - no sets - and you can also livestream them to your audiences, if necessary.

And your cast will love to perform them.

Get in touch for more details!

Piers Chater Robinson  
Composer  
piers@itmshows.com  
ITMShows.com





# The Oasis of Culture

## NODA Wales & Ireland

Maesteg Town has often been described as an Oasis of Culture. With art groups, several choirs, dancing classes, a drama group and a long-standing Operatic Society, few could say otherwise. However, flashback 20 years ago, there was still a need and an ever-growing demand for a Youth Theatre.

One sunny day, over several cups of tea in the local cafe, Ruth Whelan and myself were discussing this very topic and, over the course of the afternoon, a drama workshop had been organised, and Curtain Up Youth Theatre was born.

No strangers to amateur dramatics - we both had literally grown up with family members and ourselves actively involved in local musical theatre, so we were aware of the dedication and commitment this would entail.

I can't remember if we voiced our expectations and possible guidelines at the start, we were more focused on giving children from the ages of 6-16 an opportunity to perform in a full scale musical with a professional orchestra, scenery, costumes, the whole package. It was much later, as we evolved together, that we realised what we were providing was an inclusive, welcoming, non-judgmental environment for young people to, not only explore their potential in music and drama, but to build confidence and develop vital life skills. A safe haven to 'be themselves'.

Our first production was the *Wizard of Oz*, and it's huge success spurred us on to perform many wonderful shows, such as *Honk*, *Seussical*, *The Vackees*, *Joseph*, *Grease*, *Peter Pan*, *Hairspray* and many more.

It's hard work, and there are countless pre-show sleepless nights, but we are constantly reminded of the fundamental need for youth theatre when past members say things like "Curtain Up made me who I am today!" We believe that youth theatres are essential and should be accessible to everyone; that is why we have only increased our fees by one pound over twenty years.

2019 was the end of an era for our local



*Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*



*Honk!*

community with the closing, repair and redevelopment of our Town Hall, leaving us without a performance and rehearsal venue for a couple of years.

Determined to make the most of this splendid building and 'old friend', Curtain Up performed two shows. *Alice in Wonderland* with our younger group and *The Wedding Singer* with our older members. Both shows sold out and with three past members playing in the orchestra and another on programme design, I don't think we had ever been so proud.

The camaraderie, love and support between the two groups was exceptional. We were delighted to see our NODA



*Peter Pan*

representative, Allan Mears, at the Friday night performance. I have to say, Allan has reintroduced us to NODA. His dedication and excitement about the organisation is refreshing and contagious, and we look forward to a long and happy unity.

Our 20th Anniversary Concert had to be cancelled, unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but Zoom meetings have been great, keeping Curtain Up together during Lockdown.

Hopefully, we'll come back bigger and better to celebrate our 21st - coming of age anniversary. Who knows? That might even be in the new Town Hall.



*The Wedding Singer*

# The Lindley Pantomime at the Playhouse Whitstable

## NODA South East

In 1958 it was decided that the Lindley Players first pantomime should be produced - it was a resounding success!

That was almost thirty years before the Players acquired what is now the Playhouse Theatre. This annual offering has continued every January every year since.

The great demand for seats means that patrons start to queue late in the evening on the day before tickets go on sale; with some camping out regardless of the weather. This year tickets went on sale on the 7th December with the box office open from 7.00 am for those buying tickets in person, at 12.00 tickets are available on-line. This year we sold over

50% of tickets on the 7th December 2019, which is over 1,000 seats sold.

Over the years the Lindley's have developed a tried and tested system for handling the large number of people who arrive for tickets. When they arrive, they are given a numbered ticket and then wait in the comfort of the bar until their number is called and then they go up to the box office to make their seat choice. Coffee, tea and bacon sandwiches are available to those waiting - after all who wants to queue outside in the winter? The panto box office opening is now a great Christmas tradition for Lindley customers and members alike.

The Lindley Players programme at

the Playhouse covers a wide range of plays and musical shows. Pantomime is the most important show for creating revenue, (around £20,000) to support smaller shows and help with the investment for maintenance and new equipment.

Lindley pantomime includes songs, gags, slapstick comedy and dancing. It employs gender-crossing actors and combines topical humour with a story more or less based on a well-known fairy tale, fable or folk tale. Or in the case of this year's panto a mash-up of all the best in pantomimic storytelling.

Peter Bressington

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### Love on the Beach

Male 2 Female 6

"... the audiences loved the play, and the feedback was amazing! This was the fifth play by Raymond Hopkins that we have performed, and I believe it was his best."  
Endeavour Theatre Company—Australia

"We've enjoyed an extremely successful five day run with this play - audience numbers were the best we've had for years."  
The Wisbech Players—UK

Now enjoying success around the world

### Looking for Love

Male 4 Female 5

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"A wonderful, funny play ... really, really enjoyed every minute."  
"One of the funniest shows for a long time."  
"Excellent, cried with laughter."

Now enjoying success around the world



### Love on the Beach

A FARCICAL COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By  
RAYMOND HOPKINS

PINSLEY PLAYS



### Looking for Love

A FARCICAL COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By  
RAYMOND HOPKINS

PINSLEY PLAYS



# Supporting amateur theatre in times of need...

“ Our claim was dealt with efficiently. I sent in the relevant paperwork as requested with a covering letter and that was it! ”

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